

MEN DISLIKE WOMEN

A ROMANCE

• I •

AT last the traffic moved on. I write under correction when I say that there could not have been fewer than fifty million cars besides mine crawling down Fifty-seventh Street to Second Avenue. Screaming like blind men in the belly of a worm, we were all making for Queensboro Bridge. A lot the worm cared. There were a thousand towers on its crest. And did you say gold? Look on this golden, golden worm! It is the world's most wonderful worm. The worm, you understand, with the gigantic skyline. God's Own Worm. Why should such a superb worm care? But we, crawling about in its belly towards seven o'clock of

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a spring evening, tried to breathe and to move, and do you know that we failed, and do you wonder that we hated each other?

Why this rush for Queensboro Bridge? Let us conceal nothing. Queensboro Bridge leads out of New York, and what bridge can do more?

I had been in New York for seven weeks
And I was escaping.

O New York, let this thy humble guest
now depart in peace. Let his ears forget
thy thunder, let his eyes regain their focus
after the strain of looking on thy spectacles
and glorious towers, let his nerves be as they
were before they tried to understand thy
simple but shifty morality, and let his sense
of proportion return to him after his sojourn
in the capital of the land of opportunity.
O Babylon ! O boredom !

But the mountain of stone and the labyrinth of steel, trumpeting its way towards oblivion, belches with laughter.

And unceasingly echoing the simple eagerness of its audacious and naïve creators,

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New York pierces the bowels of strangers with the scream ! “ And how do *you* like New York ? ”

A swell city, monsieur. I detest it.

The green fields around New York, very properly indulging themselves in a sense of their own importance, archly hide behind service-stations and adverteyesments. The eye, unrefreshed, is instructed. Knowledge, that eludes the wisest men, presses herself upon us. The best things in life, you understand, are free.

O Jesus, who loved the truth, look on these adverteyesments and take your fill. Heed not the philosophers, nor give ear to the learned men. This is the world. There may be another world, there may be a world of the mind, who knows but there's a world of the spirit. But this, the Lord have mercy on us, is the world. Watch us do our stuff. Learn, for example, that it is good for you to smoke cigarettes—but only certain brands—and I don't mean maybe. And did you know that cigarettes *satisfied* ? Satisfied

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what? Oh, you'd be surprised! Look, too, on that picture of a poor handsome youth, so lonely and so despairing, while his friends are having the time of their lives. Learn, Master, that this youth's sin is not that he has denied his God or coveted his neighbour's wife, but that of halitosis, which can be cured, not by fasting and repentance, but by mouth wash. Behold, use Listerine.

I congratulated myself on the car I was driving, a sports Packard. It was a fine car. Crawling along between innumerable cars, I permitted myself the luxury of wondering whose it was. Could it be my brother's? Was it his butler's? "In this country, sir, the prosperity of our people is such, the standard of living so high, the optimism of our bankers so infectious, the temptations to live beyond our incomes so admirably presented and the opportunities for speculation made so agreeable, that there can be no excuse for even the meanest of our community denying themselves the

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luxuries of life, as enjoyed by Kuhn, Loeb and Co." How splendid that was ! Thus I had picked up a Packard by merely stepping into it, inspired by the certainty that the fellow who owned it could go to the nearest store and step into another. These cute little tricks, like Prohibition, are darn good for business.

I gave myself up to the pleasures of my holiday. Knowing nothing whatsoever of my direction beyond the fact that I was on Long Island, I avoided the stream of cars by taking side roads whenever possible. I lost myself. It was delightful. And I felt the weight of a profound truth, that Long Island only ceases to be long when you are alone on it. I lost myself tremendously. Time passed. No one killed it. No one helped it along, no one was crazy about it, no one gave it a swell time, no one entertained it or laughed it away. What a relief ! I found myself in quiet places. Was I trespassing on private grounds ? I delayed. I stared about. And time just passed.

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Behind me the red glare of New York lit the sky. Catch New York not making a superb mess of the sky !

And with a shock I realised that, immersed in my stolen pleasure, I had failed to observe the passing of twilight. My heart beating, I switched on the head lamps. A scream rang out. A horse, immense in the outraged darkness, was rearing frantically over my bonnet.

I leapt at its head.

What nonsense one writes ! But one has read so often of men leaping at horses' heads that one writes such things without thinking. I did not leap at its head. I leapt in every other direction. And I made soothing noises. Then at last I had the sense to switch out the head lamps. This, no doubt together with the soothing noises, calmed the beast down.

Then I leapt at its head.

"Sorry," I called out. "But he is all right now."

There was a desperate unease in the

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answering silence. There was an agony of breathlessness in the darkness above me. Then something fell, and I caught it.

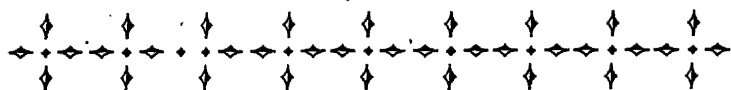
Well, this was a nice mess. Belatedly doing the heroic thing, I carried the slight figure to the car. Whose figure? Whose car? Alas!

He was dressed unusually for a cavalier, in grey flannel trousers too large for him, an open tennis shirt and a grubby felt hat crammed down over his eyes.

"I'm so sorry," I said. "Stupid of me to put on my lights like that."

Lying back, panting, his eyes closed, the youth murmured:

"Thank you, darling."



• II •

I sit at home in Paris trying to write of what happened to me fourteen months ago in the United States of America.

Now before beginning this story I took professional advice, and was told that a story should begin with a swing. When I asked why a story should begin with a swing I was told because it was a Good Thing. So I have begun with a swing. But after swinging about for a while one finds it necessary to offer certain explanations. There are gaps to be filled and backgrounds suggested. Then perhaps one can start swinging again.

For example, I am positive my mother would be disappointed if I were to write a book without mentioning her. And what's more, she would like to have me on her side. She had, poor woman, quite a dose

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of "impersonal" people in her lifetime.

My mother, owing to my father's desire to carry on the principles of equality and fraternity with the owners of Rolls-Royce cars, was a Schvengenstein of the great New York banking house of Stern, Schvengenstein, Wolff and Steiner, known for short, so I have heard, as Shine and Sheeny.

I do not remember her. My younger brother Pierre says he does, but Pierre is one of those extraordinary people who are "proud" of having a long memory. But not long ago I came across an old packet of my mother's letters to her sisters, the Chicago Schvengensteins, and from reading them it is difficult to imagine a shrewder, a more grasping, a better-intentioned or a more unhappy woman. These letters were such a complete exposure of her character and disappointments that, after reading only a few of them, I found them quite unendurable and destroyed the lot.

Julia Schvengenstein, a dollar princess, married my father, a Frenchman of what

used to be called "family," for social position. She was ill-advised, and was bitterly mortified on realising her mistake.

My father belonged to a family as old and as dishonourable as any in the Catholic peerages of Europe. In his youth he had become estranged from his powerful relations. But this would not have mattered if he had married according to their wishes. For in France it is difficult to become completely estranged from one's family. In a country that has no windows, for no Frenchman wants to look out of them unless it is to lodge a complaint or to write an "enter-taining" book, it is difficult not to be interested in one's immediate relations. My father's were but waiting for him to make a "good" marriage to fall on his neck.

They were at first almost conciliated by his marriage to a wealthy Jewess. The name of Schvengenstein was decidedly unpalatable, but the fortune was formidable. My mother, however, did not act intelligently. She protested her conversion to the Catholic

religion, and that with her wealth might have won them over. But my mother was careful with her money—she was married under the *séparation de biens* arrangement—and could not help showing it. Poor woman she tried not to, but her thrift was stronger than even her ambition. Also, she believed in the bourgeois principle of give and take. This was unendurable to my father's people. The thrifty aristocracy of France will not tolerate thrift in a foreigner who wishes to enter the charmed circle.

My unhappy mother made the ultimate mistake, in a fit of temper, of not subscribing to Catholic and royalist charities as largely as a converted Jewess should, and was therefore branded as "impossible" by a society which has long been supposed to be exclusive but which can be entered by any wealthy woman who will spend her money generously, who will be content to be no more than tolerated, and who has* no desire whatsoever for the conversation of reasonably intelligent men and women.

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I can find very little to say about my father. I have heard that he was a charming man, and no doubt that is a very good thing to be. He was pretty certainly the "amusing" sort of cad that charming men of his class and tradition are in most countries. As a rule they have vaguely homosexual tendencies and are fond of money in a secretive way.

I find myself passionately taking my unhappy mother's side in her quarrels with that charming gentleman of the old school. He had a fine disregard for the implications of a bargain, had Achille de Saint-Cloud. And, what must have been like a whip-lash to my mother, a flair for expressing his distastes "amusingly." Poor Julia Schven-genstein, one can easily understand, was prolific in providing him with distastes about which to be "amusing."

But what is the use of going on about it? After all, the first lesson a young man has to learn is that he must forgive his father, for he knew not what he did.

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My mother forgave neither him nor his relations. And she did not forgive France. How lovely is France to those who love her ! What a mean and spiteful old hag she seems to those who don't !

They were killed in a railway accident when my brother Pierre and I were very small children. My father was killed instantly. My mother, always the unlucky one, endured torture before she died. Then the fun began. My father's clan at once made a grab for the two wealthy orphans. But the late Julia Schvengenstein, Comtesse de Saint-Cloud, had foreseen that. Detesting the land of her humiliation, she wished her children to be brought up in England by her maiden sister Ruth. She knew that her husband's relations would never permit this in the ordinary way, and therefore bequeathed to each one of them a handsome annuity on condition that Pierre and I were brought up in England until our sixteenth year. Thus she provided for herself an outlet for her contempt and my father's clan a reason for theirs.

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Aunt Ruth was a darling. Healthy, well off, beloved of all who knew her, you would have thought she simply had to be the happiest woman alive—or, anyhow, at Brighton, where she lived. But she went to infinite pains to forge for herself a cross to bear. This cross was the Church of Rome. Aunt Ruth was one of those kind and intelligent Jewesses who consider themselves to be Christians merely because they have been converted. One thinks of the old story of the converted Jew and the humpback walking past a synagogue. "I was a Jew once," said the Jew. "And I was a humpback once," said the other. So dear Aunt Ruth passed her life in a state of agitated suspense, forever expecting someone to ask her whether she was a Jewess.

She brought us up to be good little Catholic boys. Then we went to Beaumont, and became nice little English boys as well. Then, to dear Aunt Ruth's distress, we had to return to France, my uncle insisted on our going to the Collège de Normandie, and

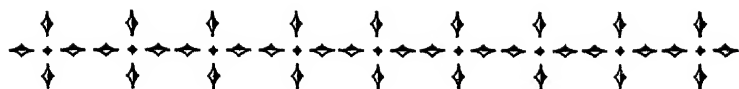
so we turned out to be nasty little French boys, after all.

Aunt Ruth left us each a million dollars in her will. We did not need this money. It should have gone to certain charities which had reason to expect it. But dear Aunt Ruth left it to us for no other reason, I fancy, than because we neither of us looked in the least Jewish. What is the use of calling such people "silly"? And what is being "silly," and what is being "wise"? So many of the "wise" things people do have no real foundation in their beings, so many of the "silly" things they do are dictated by profound human impulses. For example, I made over my share of Aunt Ruth's inheritance to the charities that had been led to expect it, and my brother Pierre kept his. Mine was a "wise" move, for no man needs too much. But my wise generosity sprang from indolence and fear of responsibility. It was "silly" of Pierre to grab all he could get, for such wealth would only bother him. But whereas I was not sincere, Pierre

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was quite sincerely expressing one of the most profound desires of mankind, which is to be richer than the other fellow.

I shall leave out the war except to say that in 1917 the smallest possible piece of shrapnel took away the smallest possible piece of my skull, and that let me out nicely with a slight headache as an inseparable companion. But that, one fancies, is what's the matter with a great number of the men of our time.



• III •

PIERRE and I were brought up to speak English and French equally well : that is to say, French well and English as badly as most Englishmen. We always spoke to each other in English. It is the language for brothers, for one can say less.

Pierre was always the more active one. Or is the right expression “worth while” ? For example, he had no sooner disengaged himself from the war, in which he had very sensibly capitalised his education in England by getting a job as *liaison* officer, than he discovered an obsession to become richer than he already was.

That, of course, was not what he said. All he said was that he “disliked doing nothing.” That is a very Anglo-Saxon phrase, which is to say that it means something until you look at it carefully, and then

it means something else. In this case it meant that Pierre wanted to do some real work, if only for the good of his soul ; but when you looked at it carefully it meant that he wanted to go to New York and make money on the stock market. And that was what he did.

I never for a moment doubted Pierre's success in America. For one thing, he had the quiet sulky good looks of a man who needs someone to take care of him, and so he would find plenty. Women are so easily taken in by a man who makes them rely on their intuition. And another advantage he had was that he was one of those enviable men who are without any consciousness whatsoever of eternity. This gives them grip, grit, guts, pep, poise, pluck, stability, stamina, and what more do you want ?

One regrets to say, however, that Pierre fell short of new world requirements in one important particular. The naughty boy had no ideal of service. But he took pains to hide that behind a tremendous capacity

for listening to the anecdotes of successful men. Bankers took the quiet and clever young man seriously. As for Pierre, the suave and logical immorality of the transatlantic banking system made an irresistible appeal to the serious financier in him. Also, a flash of Semitic common-sense informed him of the secret of successful Christianity. Selling all he had, he gave to the rich. And lo, it was returned unto him a thousandfold by railways, industrials and public utilities.

But Pierre did not lose his head. On the contrary, he courted and married Isabella Van Asprey, the daughter of one of the first families of old New York. Well, Pierre always had a sharp eye for the main chance. *Un grand parti américain.*

His marriage made a great hit with my father's people. But what a shame it was that dear Aunt Ruth was not alive to rejoice ! How proud she would have been of her little Pierre ! For the son of a Schvengenstein mother to marry a Van Asprey or a Vanderbilt, and one in good standing, is a

phenomenon for which we in Europe have hardly a parallel. There were some of the Frankfurt Schvengensteins in Paris at that time. And, rejoicing quietly but exceedingly, they sent Pierre a service of gold plate. This was funny, since they were proud, practising Jews, had disapproved of our mother for changing her religion, and cared nothing for the social distinctions of anyone in Christendom. But all the same Pierre got away with their gold plate. Well, people get a lot of fun out of being inconsistent.

Soon after his marriage Pierre half-heartedly tried to persuade me to visit him in New York. I wondered why, since Pierre did his elder brother the honour to be vaguely afraid of him. This was merely the vague but uncomfortable fear of the man who is always wanting something for the man who wants nothing. But I fancy my wanting nothing was no more than a pose, for since then I have found myself wanting a great deal.

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In one of his letters Pierre affected to deplore my indolence, my absorption in a life of books with a lacing of the demi-monde. I wondered what sort of a husband Pierre, who was a man of pleasure in a seriously secretive way, made for a decent straightforward girl. I decided to visit them. It was high time, too, to see the home town of the Sterns, the Schvengensteins and the Steiners, whence my undeserved fortune came.

At this time many Frenchmen and Italians were going to the United States by every boat, concealing with quiet desperation their eagerness to wolf down as many dollars as possible in the shortest possible time beneath invitations to stay with American friends at Newport, Southampton, Bar Harbour, or Hollywood.

I fancy that the real reason why I went to New York was because Mrs. Hepburn was going. She begged me to keep her company on the voyage. No doubt this decided me, for it was always understood

between us that Sheila could do with me what she wished. I gather that this was also the original understanding between the Statue of Liberty and her worshippers. But things don't seem to turn out quite like that, at least not in a big way.

Sheila and I could play this game very prettily up to a point because she never wished to do very much—with me, that is. With other men she, alas, permitted her generosity to take what her compatriots called an “un-English” form.

Sheila was the dearest, the most unselfish, and the most stupid of women. I was curious to see how her radiant frailty would mingle with the chivalry of her male cousins across the seas. Had I but foreseen the consequences of that intermingling !

Sheila's was one of those lovely fair inane faces which are known abroad, for some reason, as “typically English.” She was so utterly devoid of expression that it was delightful merely to sit and look at her and dream of better things. Like Rousseau's

philosophy, Sheila's lovely face made it possible for exasperated men to dream new dreams. It is true that dreaming new dreams does not do anyone much good, and the result only exasperates men more, but all the same there is the illusion of something fine about them. Sheila's beauty gave one this illusion. Her temperament, however, did not permit her to make only intangible gifts. The more helpless sort of men made an irresistible appeal to Sheila's perverse gift of acquiescence. And of course she was lonely, too. Sheilas always are.

With a comfortable little fortune of her own, Sheila had left her native London for Paris to forget the tragedy of her married life. She did forget it, but she did not forget that there was such a possibility as a "divinely happy" married life. This was the light that guided Sheila down the path of her trifling adventures. This was the light that beckoned Sheila, and this was the light that always went out.

Alas, poor Sheila ! If only she could have

become a calculating cad, like some of her compatriots settled in Paris, she might have found her happy marriage. But, forever unable to grasp what it was all about, she became the joy and the victim of shady men. There was nothing to be done with her. Incapable of a wise or an ungenerous action, she very soon exasperated her conventional friends. And then she denied them the amusement of being "kind" to her, for Sheila, like George Washington's later historians, was incapable of telling a lie.

Thus, her weaknesses aggravated by virtues, she had to endure every disadvantage of the disinterested. She was the fool who can do nothing profitable. The world will forgive the thief and the assassin, but bitterly resents the person who gives something for nothing. To give and not to take is most perilous to our good fame. "Generosity needs infinitely more tact than burglary." And it is anti-social, too. Sheila gave herself, and asked for nothing in return. This

had the natural effect of attaching to her every scoundrel in Paris. She made an irresistible appeal to profoundly selfish men, since nothing attracts selfish men so urgently as the hope of salvation when offered unselfishly. She always found them out in the end, but continued to hope for the best.

I implored her not to encourage the facile devotion of men whom she could not respect.

"Since," she said in effect, for she was quite unable to express herself, "since I do not respect myself, and am at the same time full of self-pity, how can I honestly refuse my sympathies to men I don't respect? André, I know you think I'm not right in the head but, believe me, I do nothing that isn't strictly logical."

Thus Sheila, inspired by the most virtuous sentiments and with the help of strictly logical reasoning, insisted on descending to the bottomless pit. But she was not quite so sensitive to adversity as most people are. Were frail and lovely women not so extra-

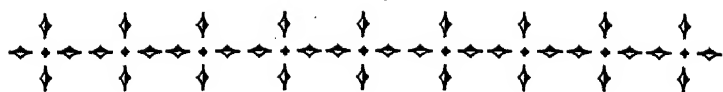
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ordinarily thick-skinned, the history of the world might have run a very different course. Also, what always saved dear Sheila her fair share of mortal miseries was her infinite capacity for not knowing what it was all about. She groped hopefully among the mysteries of human nature. She groped beautifully and luminously. But her great shining eyes, that were like stars to the men who loved her, or said they did, never gave her any light at all. Stars, indeed ! What Sheila wanted was to have things explained to her. And it was in quest of some explanation that her flurried little brain would understand that Sheila determined to visit the United States. She had had some American beaux, and thought they were nice.

And so, in the great ship *Berengaria*, we started out on our adventures. For us it was a great adventure. We could not understand how people could take this voyage so calmly, eating and drinking and dancing and playing bridge as though no-

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thing of immense importance was happening. How casual, how calm they were, the pretty girls and the fat men and the hungry but suave Europeans on the boat ! But Sheila and I were going to a new world. We were convinced that we were going to a new world, in spite of the fact that everyone had always told us that it *was* a new world. And, you know, we found an extremely new world. I haven't yet gotten over it. ♡



• IV •

PIERRE came on board to greet me. The last I was to see of Sheila for some weeks was a glimpse of her between two men going towards the Customs. Had I known that that was the last I was to see of her for some weeks I should have insisted on staying on the *Berengaria* and going back home in her.

Pierre hurried me off the boat. He was the same Pierre, a little silky, a little sulky, always quite certain of what he wanted and always giving the impression of being charmingly uncertain. Thus men devour women and women exasperate men. Pierre hurried me along through the crowds.

"I've got to get back," he said. "But Isabella will take care of you."

"Get back?" I said.

"Market's shaky to-day. But Isabella..."

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"You don't mean to say she has come here!"

"Of course."

"I've heard," I said, "of American hospitality . . ."

"Isabella is pretty good at it," Pierre said.

I didn't realise, at the time, what that meant. A tall handsome girl with magnificent teeth and wonderfully frank and friendly eyes was smiling at us.

"You're not a bit alike," she said.

"I always thought I was the wiser, sister Isabella, until this moment."

"Do you like your new sister, André?"

"It's amazing to me how, with those eyes, you haven't yet seen through Pierre."

When she laughed, as she often did, you understood at once why everyone said that my brother Pierre was a lucky dog. But at the moment Pierre could think only that it was near noon and that the market was shaky, and so he left us.

"Now I'm going to take care of you," Isabella said.

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And that, you know, was the beginning of the series of shocks dealt to me by my dear companion. At first, as we burrowed through the frightful crevasses of New York towards East Sixty-first Street, I withstood these shocks, telling myself it simply could not be true. But it was true. It was horribly true. Let me explain myself. By three o'clock that afternoon I was forced to realise that I was in society.

The irony of this ! To have travelled so far—and to find myself plumb in the middle of the right people !

I cursed myself for not having thought of this before. But I had not thought of it simply because I had for so long lived my own sort of life that I could not have imagined myself living a formal one. How stupid I had been to come ! But it hadn't occurred to me that Isabella, the flower of a nobility as proud as any that Europe ever knew, could be at all different from the many easy-going young American women I had known. She was very dif-

ferent indeed. Those frank and kindly eyes of Isabella's could look kindly only at a world in which men and women lived up to their responsibilities. She was not a snob. She was merely herself, une femme sérieuse. And it was this young lady, my brother's dear young wife, who was to take care of me ! Could anything have been more ironical ? Of me, who had for so long offended my relations in France by my haphazard way of living, who was generally recognised by men and women of my own sort to be quite *abruti*, who had long since been divorced from the gatherings of the best people and the right people—of me, in a word, a tramp.

But let there be no misunderstanding. It was not because I was a titled Frenchman that I was given a " good " time in America. The fool and his title are not anything out of the way in the United States. Americans in America are not title snobs in the sense that the English have always been and the Americans in Europe have painfully learnt

to be. I have read in a book by a great American that this is because the people of the United States are a provincial people, and that the first impulse of provincial people all the world over is to measure the size of a stranger's head. To that one can only add that if they find the stranger's head too big he doesn't get a job, not even the job for which most Europeans apply, which is the nice job of being a guest.

No, it was dear Isabella and the Van Asprey connection that spoilt any chances I might have of amusing myself in my own way. I was the elder brother of Pierre de Saint-Cloud, who had had the good fortune to marry Isabella, and everyone loved and respected and sought after Isabella, and everyone loved and respected and sought after Isabella's father and uncles and aunts, and everyone said that Isabella was the very best thing of her kind in the world, and everyone was quite right, and—Oh, the devil !

So it was impossible for me, without taking steps of a very serious nature and

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thus compromising my brother's good name with his new relations, to reveal myself as no more than a tramp who had come to America to amuse himself among the lower sort. Well, I decided to sacrifice myself. These are not mere words. I had, among other things, to forswear Sheila. Isabella was kind to fallen women in hospitals, but she ignored them in hotels.

So, for me, began that round of gaiety which, dominated by a relentless determination for not allowing you to enjoy your meals in peace, is known as "giving you a good time." Well, I had a marvellous time. How could it be otherwise? Everything was planned out for me. Isabella saw to everything. It was obvious that, living among the feckless natives of Europe, I had not heard the whole truth about American hospitality. It appeared that throughout my visit I should have and could have nothing whatsoever to do but just breathe. For the rest, everything was planned out for me.

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As I think back to that first day of my arrival in New York, that phrase keeps on recurring to my mind. To have everything planned out for one ! Those words were among the first of the shocks dealt to me by Isabella of the kind eyes. They came popping out as she and I sat at luncheon alone. At that very moment I was looking forward to a whole series of such lunches alone with Isabella, for she was really a dear.

Then out popped that remarkable phrase.

Staggering beneath its implications, I could only smile ingratiatingly. And it was then that I noticed for the first time that Isabella did not wear powder or rouge. Well, she had skin and colouring that any woman would envy. But such is the decadence of our civilization that I found that the absence of cosmetics on her face gave her an artificial look, and I wondered if I should ever manage to be natural with this very nice person.

I said : " Isabella, please don't have

things planned out for me. I'd really very much prefer to——"

"André dear, of course you will do exactly as you like. I only want to make certain that you have a really good time while you are here. Now is there anything you very particularly want to do—anyone you particularly want to meet?"

"I'll amuse myself easily," I said. "And of course there are some friends of mine who came over on the same boat whom I ought to make an effort to see . . ."

"Of course, André. You must have them here exactly when you like. You will promise me to think of this as your house, won't you, André? But there's one thing I simple must warn you about. You won't mind, I know, because there's something so sensible back of that puzzled little smile of yours. André, I'm so very glad to meet you at last. But what I wanted to say was this—that the main thing for nice visitors here is to avoid getting themselves mixed up with funny people. This really is a

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melting-pot, you know, André. And some foreigners come over here and get themselves in quite wrong at the beginning and then it's difficult, you see, for us to do anything about it."

And she called my smile a puzzled little smile! It was helpless. Oh, lost! Good-bye, Sheila.

"Oh, you are going to have a lovely time, André! And it's going to be so exciting for me showing you round. Don't you feel the air here doing something to you already? You'll see, André. Now I'll tell you what I've got planned out for you as a beginning. Of course I knew you would like to be quiet the first week. Now to-night, just to make you feel at home . . . you'll really love Ruth and Johnnie . . . to-morrow lunch . . . it may *seem* rather a big party, but it isn't really . . . then in the evening . . . of course you will be crazy about Will, everyone is, men and women . . . the most attractive house of its kind in New York . . . I'll say this for the

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Bellamys, they do know how to mix people . . . Rhinelanders . . . Vanderbilts . . . Rudy Vallée . . . Goelets . . . Astors . . . George Gershwin . . . Harrimans . . . Bakers . . . just a few people in to supper after the theatre . . . you'll be crazy about the Ogralt's swimming-pool . . . mosaics by Anrep . . . Condé wants to give a dinner for you, and he always has the loveliest people . . . Frank Crowninshield . . . Harry Richman . . . this week-end . . . Monday . . . Wednesday . . . Meadow Brook . . . but you can play bridge if you like . . . you should see their place at Palm Beach . . . of course he lives in Europe now, in a castle or something on the Riviera . . . Rudy Vallée . . . next Thursday . . . Jascha Heifetz . . . we can lunch quietly at the Colony and go on . . .”

“Isabella,” I said, “I’ve never hated a conversation more. This is downright persecution.”

She laughed. I liked the woman, drat her.

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"Pierre told me," she smiled, "that you were never serious."

If only, in the face of her steely eagerness to be kind, I had had the courage to say I was deadly serious ! We are told that love and hate are divided from one another by a thin line. In the same way does the foul head of persecution rear itself behind the bright—the altogether too bright, if one may make a suggestion—face of hospitality.

"I do hope, André, that you have made plans to stay with us at least two months."

Two months ! Eight weeks ! Sixty days ! Sixty nights ! And every minute beautifully planned out for me ! Ah, no.

"Isabella dear, thank you very much, but really three weeks is all I can . . ."

"But, André, you must—please !"

"I shouldn't dream of going so soon, Isabella, but it's duty that calls me back to Paris."

Duty—that should impress her.

"What sort of duty ?"

"Well, I've simply got to attend a funeral

at the beginning of next month. A near relation of mine is . . .”

“Please do be serious, André dear. I’ve been so counting on you for a nice long visit.”

What was this? Why was she so uncommonly earnest? I stared at her stupidly. She was looking at me . . . guiltily. Good Lord, what was this? Were Pierre and Isabella, after only two years of married life, already in difficulties? I felt depressed.

“I’m positive I’m going to like you so much, André. You will stay, won’t you?”

“Yes,” I said.

Well, this was a nice thing. *Un grand parti américain.*

“Tell me all about it,” I said.

She opened her eyes wide—and acted. Like most good women, she acted extremely well.

“Why, all about what?” she said.

“Of course,” I said, “it’s your own fault. Why a nice American woman wants to marry a European I simply can’t make out.”

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“ Why shouldn’t she, André ? ”

“ Well, here’s one good reason: the modern American man is the invention of the American woman. So she always knows exactly what he will do. But she is apt to be bewildered by Europeans.”

“ Who invented the modern European man, André ? ”

“ Mohammed and Voltaire,” I said. “ But that’s not the point. The point is that you are not happy. What shall we do about it, sister ? ”

She said : “ You are not touching your fruit salad. It’s good for you in this weather.”

I said : “ What is the good of trying to help women ? They are such incurable liars about themselves.”

She said : “ They’re not. It’s only that they are too proud to——”

“ Proud ? ” I said. “ Rubbish ! I’ll tell you what I admire about American women like you, Isabella. You have an extraordinary talent for being able to impose

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seriousness on yourselves. This enables you, as a relaxation, to enjoy the plays of Eugene O'Neill—and, as part of the routine of life, to carry enormous weights of devotion and responsibility."

"How do you mean I impose seriousness on myself?"

"Well, fancy not using any powder or rouge! It's all part of your artificial seriousness."

"What would you advise, André?"

"Well," I said. . . .

"I see," she said, the dear. -



• V •

LET me try to describe Isabella—in her social aspect, of course. The first thing that impressed one about her was the magnificent facade she presented. Or was it a shop window? In the same way that Soames Forsyte is the shop window in which Mr. Galsworthy, with a matchless combination of suavity and sincerity and flattery, has arrayed “all the inevitable characteristics” of an Englishman of property. Yes, Isabella had her shop window. And within this for all to see, was arrayed, by an even higher hand than Mr. Galsworthy’s, a collection of the “best” and the most “representative” things in America: fearlessness, the ability to work, the spirit of independence, health, wealth, the sense of responsibility and the love of good report.

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Thus it was impossible not to respect Isabella for the quantity of good things she contained, as it is impossible not to respect a first-class American magazine for the quantity of good things it contains. But it was what she advertised in herself that made her, as it does an American magazine, remarkable. She was an advertisement for Healthy Foods, Outdoor Exercise, Progress, Traditions, Civilization, Dentifrice, and, in a superbly complete sense, the ardent spirit of the new world.

And somewhere beneath all this, if you looked very carefully and patiently, was Isabella. Tradition takes deep roots in people, they say, and the sense of duty and the love of good report. But somewhere beneath all these was Isabella, and she was my brother's young wife, and she was lonely and unhappy. *

All the same it was her facade that, in the following weeks, influenced me enormously. She could not help knowing that she "stood for" better things than I did,

and she sincerely wanted me to adjust my "viewpoint."

(I put these representative words between quotation marks because, like the bleating of innumerable sheep at nightfall, they dominate the quiet landscape of reasonable language.)

It is true that not even Isabella could change me into a clean young American. But she did her best. In spite of everything I could say she persisted in her opinion that at bottom I was "worth while." The fact that I could knock spots off most of her friends at golf and tennis surprised, delighted and encouraged Isabella. She considered this not as a sign of a misspent youth but as a Good Sign. This Good Sign illusion is peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon peoples. If a Frenchman is a world's champion at tennis, as even Frenchmen sometimes are, his compatriots are delighted but are not therefore convinced that he wears wings beneath his tennis shirt. In England and America it is taken for granted that a man

whose eye for a ball commands respect must necessarily have more Good in him than the other fellow. Why? But this illusion persists in face of the fact that there is a great deal more humbug, conceit, caddishness and corruption among the well-known sportsmen of the world than among the politicians, whom it is convenient and human to blame for everything.

But I grew so fond of Isabella that I willingly permitted her the luxury of arousing my conscience. Also, disguising my depression as well as I could, I did everything she had "planned out" for me.

Only once did I come near to forfeiting her affection. At one luncheon party I came across a young Frenchman whom I detested and avoided in Paris. Instantly falling on his neck, I whispered hoarsely: "Do not desert me. Stay with me all afternoon. Come with me and meet Jascha Heifetz, Jack Dempsey, Arthur Rubenstein, Greta Garbo, Edna Ferber, John Drinkwater, George Gershwin, Andrew Mellon,

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Harpo Marx, Thomas Edison and the Frattellini Brothers. You will be crazy about my sister-in-law and in return she will have everything planned out for you. Do not desert me. Remember we are both Frenchmen. Do you want to hear Hugh Walpole lecture to-morrow? Here are two tickets. Do you want a dentist? Does your boot-legger satisfy you? Do you need a confessor? My sister-in-law Isabella, who is charming, will arrange everything for you."

Thus a longing for solitude, which thoughtless men do everything to avoid, began to leave me no peace. But what was to be done? I had but to say so to Isabella for the dear creature to rush me down to the Ogralt's place at Cold Spring Harbour: where, she would assure me, there was "no one"; where, that is to say, there were never less than fifteen to twenty Ogralts, one and all trying to get thinner and thinner on the fat of the land.

As for Pierre . . .

Pierre, you understand, had become an

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American. That is to say, he looked quiet, patient, hard-worked and obedient. But what went on beneath that ?

There are two well-known theories about the relations of American men to their wives. The popular one is that they are neglected by their wives. Let us call that A. The more subtle and less advertised theory is that they neglect their wives. Let us call that B.

A. To begin with, the average American man of education is more courteous, agreeable, generous and better informed than his European debtor. And the man in the street is infinitely more helpful to strangers. And the manners of the men with women are infinitely superior to the manners of European men with women.

Now one of the first things to strike the visitor about the United States is that the dear old mother-in-law joke has been tracked to its last resting-place. The joke has come true in the United States. In fact all the old jokes about patient and downtrodden

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and anxious men seem to have come true in the United States. That is how it strikes one at first.

One is surprised at the spectacle of men, dead tired after a hard day's work, spending their evenings in going where they are told to go, in dining where they are told to dine, in going to plays that bore them and to parties that exasperate them. Regularly deprived of their full eight hours' sleep, they wear enormous spectacles to help their tired eyes down the day's market quotations and, having made or lost another million, go home to be told they must change for dinner because a confounded Frenchman or a boring Englishman—the two hungriest nationalities in the United States—is coming to dine.

And bridge, like a pestilence from hell, decimates their feeble hours of leisure.

Is it worth it?

The visitor's surprise becomes amazement when he realises that his hosts think this state of affairs quite right and proper.

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For if a wife begins to show any signs of being really considerate to her husband, if she is so wanting in womanly inspiration as to refuse his presents on the ground that he can't really afford them, if she goes to such ridiculous lengths as wanting him to share her bed for whole nights at a time instead of a sketchy five minutes now and then, her husband very soon begs for a divorce and seeks a wife who will keep him in his place. He finds plenty, and then has a swell time.

We can arrive at but one conclusion. When I say "we" I mean men wiser than myself.

"America," says one writer, "has adopted the Oriental idea of marriage, but with certain rational improvements. Mustapha Kemal has cast out the harem and Mrs. Dodsworth has adopted it while Mr. Dodsworth was busy making that extra million and dreaming of better things. Thus it has come about that in America it is the men who are in the harem. They are really

quite well cared for. They could be much worse off. There are some instances of men escaping, but against such the law has enacted severe monetary penalties. The American man is kept for breeding, which he does carefully and with due regard to the fact that a wife's place really can't always be in the home, for occasional love-making, and for making money. Golf is encouraged."

That, roughly, is the widely accepted theory. Now we come to the less popular one (B), which holds that the American wife is neglected by her husband and is as thoroughly unhappy as a woman can be, whatever the situation may *look* like on the surface.

Well, and what about B?

To begin with there really is not very much about B to hang on to. We have very little data about B. Reticence covers B. That is to say, American women have come to be such confounded liars about themselves that no man can find out what is in their minds. And they get quite angry

when one so much as begins to discuss A or B.

B is pathetic, and American women have a reputation to keep up about not being pathetic, and so they don't air B. They are independent entities, American women. They stand on their own feet and can do a splendid job of work, so they don't want to admit B.

The word chivalry has a great deal to do with the tragedy of B. For in America the shy word chivalry has at last come out into the open, where it presents a rugged but attractive aspect. American men are very chivalrous. This is deeply appreciated by their women, and no wonder. But unfortunately for them there is a catch in it. It was pointed out some hundreds of years ago that chivalry can make fools of men. But since then we have realised that the chivalry of men can make awful fools of women, too. For this reason European women have long since relieved their men of the bother of being "chivalrous," pre-

ferring them to concentrate on more solid if cruder qualities. One fancies that some American women would like to dispense with it, too. They are beginning to realise that chivalry is a shy word and that it can make queer grimaces when overworked. The chivalry of American men for their women is very largely the fear of the weak for the strong. And the strong can be very lonely.

I came to understand why Isabella was so anxious for me to stay some time. She liked to have some man about the house, and Pierre was so busy. Even at nights Pierre sometimes had business engagements.

Well, and why shouldn't I have a little holiday, too?

One evening Isabella and I were returning from an afternoon party. Really, one does the most incredible things in New York. I mean, foreigners do. New York men do not, of course, go to afternoon parties, unless they are held very late in the afternoon and there is a reasonable

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chance of getting drunk just in time for dinner. But foreigners go to afternoon parties because that is what foreigners are for. In spite of the quota an increasing number of foreigners are being imported into the United States every year to amuse the female inhabitants, who are very partial to them between meals as escorts to this and that.

Returning, I say, with Isabella from an afternoon party, I saw an unattended sports Packard before the house. Whose could it be? What a fine car it was! And so handy!

For a reason I was much too afraid to define to myself, I gave way to a feeling of ungovernable excitement. But I was afraid. The camel's back was not yet broken. It sagged, but it was not quite broken. The last straw was missing. Where was the last straw? Hopefully I looked towards dear Isabella, indefatigable purveyor of last straws.

Striding into the house, she cried out :

"Now mind and dress quickly, André—white tie."

The last straw ! What a grand woman ! One could always rely on her.

"A large dinner, Isabella ?"

"Oh, Jerry Barlow always has the loveliest people. And you will be crazy about his apartment. Volkoff did it up for him."

And the dear girl ran upstairs, at every step dripping with that admirable vitality that once inspired the most upright and the most depressing inhabitants of England to step on board the *Mayflower* and turn a wilderness into a melting-pot.

"White tie, remember !" she called back.

The front door was still ajar behind me. Over my shoulder I glanced at the sports Packard. What a fine car ! And fast too, no doubt.

"All right," I said.

"We'll be going on to Muriel's later. She's got Chaliapine," came from upstairs.

So ! I was to dine with Jerry Barlow and be crazy about his apartment and then go

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on to someone called Muriel who had Chaliapine. Well, Muriel could keep Chaliapine. Nobody on earth was going to be allowed to sing Russian songs to me that night. Flinging open the door, I leapt into the Packard. Jerry Barlow, indeed ! Muriel, indeed ! O Liberty, O Solitude ! Breathing deeply, I reflected that I was perhaps the only Frenchman in America since La Fayette who had turned his back on a free meal. This was a solemn thought, worthy to be handed down to one's children. I reflected that this spirit of independence was no doubt due to my English education. How independent an English education makes everyone but Englishmen !



• VI •

THUS, at nightfall in a quiet place on Long Island, I came face to face with a horse, and on the horse was a boy, and I scared the life out of the pair of them.

Well, I wasn't too happy, either. This was what came of not letting dear Isabella have everything planned out for me. For here I was in a predicament. Had the boy stayed on his confounded horse the predicament would have remained a minor one, but the boy had permitted himself to be carried into the car and so the predicament was a major one.

It was easy enough to deal with the horse by attaching his reins to the door-handle. The boy remained to be dealt with. His face was hidden by the brim of his deplorable hat, but I had the impression that he was an unusually delicate boy. Besides,

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had he not said "Thank you, darling"? But the last thing one should do is to judge people rashly, and particularly boys. It is well known that boys are becoming queerer and queerer every day. This boy undoubtedly enjoyed comfort to a degree that would have struck a Spartan as peculiar. But the Spartans were pretty queer, too.

His eyes closed, Cupie sighed and leant back comfortably against the seat. The horse looked about him with well-bred boredom. He was no hot-house plant, anyhow. He looked for a long time at a light behind a tree, which I with my superior intelligence knew to be the moon. But I did not say anything, for I had quite enough on my mind.

We were on a quiet curving avenue which could lead only to a mansion, a Country House. There was a faint tang in the sweet air. Was I near the sea? Well, this was a nice mess. What the dickens was I doing here? Beguiled by the sports Packard, which was no doubt used to the best of

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everything, I had strayed into someone's private park near the sea.

The boy was now resting comfortably against my shoulder. He seemed to find something nice and homelike about me. The brim of his deplorable hat hid all his features but his nose, which struck me as a very dainty affair.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

He gave a deep sigh, but did not open his eyes.

"Your master," I said to the horse, "has swooned. What about it?"

"I'm only resting," sighed the boy. "Horses frighten me. Where am I?"

"In my car," I said gloomily.

The next sign of life he gave was to remove his hat. I had foreseen that his face would not inspire me with confidence, and I had foreseen the truth. Alas, poor butterfly! Alas, pretty butterfly! No wonder horses frightened him. How his mother must love this pretty boy! He had, too, survived the spotty age excellently. Not a spot, not a

blemish, not one rude mark, marred that manly face. In short, my situation offered no possibilities of entertainment. In addition to a stolen Packard, I now had on my hands a horse and a pretty boy who wanted a hair-cut.

Had he escaped from the mansion nearby with a view to imperilling his delicate soul at a rendezvous? What if I were accused of kidnapping him! A nice thing it would be for me to be known as a kidnapper of pretty boys. They'd say it was one of those nasty French habits. When in doubt, blame the French. Was it for this I had escaped from Isabella? Far wiser had I been to put on a white tie and dine with Jerry Barlow and after having been crazy about his apartment go on to Muriel, who had Chaliapine.

"Come, come!" I said bitterly. "Pull yourself together."

I have said that his tennis shirt was open at the neck. Glancing down, I chanced to observe that which filled me with doubt. This feeling of doubt was enjoyable. I lit

a match, and doubt became certainty. Well, this was a new development. And then I thought of Isabella, darkly. Had that dear creature planned this out for me? Was it thus, as a concession to my regrettable "Bohemianism," that she was presenting me to a bride chosen from among the right people? Isabella had a great sense of organisation. Could she, since my escape, have organised this hold-up? It was not every night that pretty girls in trousers fell off horses into one's arms. Had Isabella a finger in this?

While I was fighting these impossible suspicions, my new friend opened her eyes. Unusually and unpleasantly large for anyone in trousers, they were becoming to a girl.

"That's fine!" I said. "Splendid!"

She stared at me, in the best tradition of women rescued from death in the nick of time, from a remote distance. For now that she was a girl I liked to think I had rescued her from death. But her silence was ungrateful. I was surprised and mortified.

My situation now took on new terrors. I was in a stolen car, trespassing on private property, and at the mercy of a girl without gratitude. Well, this was a nice mess. Unable to think of anything better to do, I patted her hand. After all, she was only a child—nineteen, twenty at most. Her hand was dirty, too. This encouraged me, since there is nothing like a flaw in an inaccessible woman to bring the best out of a man.

“Poor child!” I said. “I’m so sorry.”

Her stare of remote enquiry at once changed to one of that cool reflection which is the discouraging stamp on pretty girls of success at tennis, proficiency at bridge, or of a course of instruction in the works of Mr. H. L. Mencken. She couldn’t ride a horse, anyhow. But I ceased patting.

“What?” she said.

“I hope you are all right.”

“I could die!” she said.

“Do you know,” I said, “I mistook you for a boy at first—in those trousers.”

“Trousers?” she said.

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"Yes, what you are wearing."

"Oh, pants!" she said.

They really are a very logical people. The English have much to learn from them. Let us take, for example, this question of "trousers" and "pants." After all, one does not say "a kick in the trousers" but "a kick in the pants." Therefore the Americans, foreseeing everything, have entirely dropped "trousers" for "pants." It is reasonable.

I wanted very much to ask her why she was wearing pants. But when you are trespassing on private property it is inadvisable to ask the first pretty girl you meet why she is in fancy dress.

"Were you on your way to see my father?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not. I'm afraid I've lost my way."

"You're near Port Washington," she said. "There's Manhasset Bay over there."

I felt immensely wiser. She was pre-occupied. She looked about. She looked

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at the moon, which had climbed above the trees now. It was an American moon, a little white in the face. Too many late nights.

"Silly of me," she murmured, "to think I could ride Joseph."

"He looks a fine hunter," I said.

She looked vaguely about her. Could she be looking for something?

She said: "I'm looking for my fiancé, see."

"Can I help you? How will he be dressed—in skirts or pants?"

"Oh, Charlie's miles away! Six miles at least."

What a vague girl she is, I thought. One can now understand how she comes to have mislaid her clothes.

She said: "Have I thanked you yet?"

I said: "Yes, thank you."

"Really! When? I can't remember."

"You thanked me when I carried you here."

"My Chocolate Soldier!" she said.

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Her brows had a way of playing a laughing game when her face was most serious.

"And you are sure I thanked you?" she said.

"Positive. I was very favourably impressed."

"What did I say?"

" 'Thank you, darling.' "

"Well, that was nice, wasn't it?"

"It has greater weight now, of course, since you are not a boy."

"I think it was clever of me, don't you? I mean, to have thanked you like that. It's not everyone who can tell a darling at sight, particularly at night, is it?"

"You are very generous," I said.

"It's a fault, father says. Have you got a cigarette?"

"I'm afraid I don't smoke."

She stared at me in incredulous amazement.

"A museum specimen!" she said, and closed her eyes. Her hair was dark and crisp and curly. For the rest, she looked as

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she had looked when she was a pretty boy, except of course that she was a girl. She was quite ordinary, I thought. She would be called pretty, I supposed. But one had only to go to a dance, or better still just walk up Fifth Avenue, and one could see any number as pretty or prettier. Yes, a lot prettier.

"You will think I'm crazy," she said.

Isabella has certainly had no hand in this, I thought. This girl is hardboiled.

She opened her eyes and looked dejected.

"I guess I've made a fool of myself again. Fancy not being able to manage Joseph! Do you realise that my mother, whose third husband is an Englishman, would find that *terrible*? But it's the same whatever I do. Lack of grip, that's what it is. I'm nearly twenty-one years old and no good at anything, see."

The girl was quite right, I thought. There is nothing like a few well-chosen biographical details for bringing two people together.

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"My case," I said, "is also not without interest. For one thing, I'm an orphan——"

"Well, aren't you lucky!"

"But this isn't my car," I said. "And whose car is it? That is the question."

"Don't you know?"

"That is the question—I don't know."

"Well, it's a swell car. Why worry?"

"Because I have been brought up to worry about trifles——"

"I can see what's the matter with you—you're overcivilized."

"It's easy to talk! You don't know my sister-in-law Isabella. What she will think of me doesn't bear thinking of."

Thrusting her body across my legs, she opened her eyes very wide and stared at her reflection in the mirror by the windscreen.

"Gosh, what a sight I look!"

"You looked a good deal worse as a boy."

I observed that her eyes were grey. This lent an entirely unsuitable dignity to her face. Her face was an absurdly small and frivolous affair. It called for brown

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eyes. I closed my eyes and tried to picture all the girls I had seen at dances and on Fifth Avenue. No, I had not seen many with grey eyes. I was unprepared for grey eyes, which denote modesty, fidelity, reflection, idealism, piety and a distaste for wearing pants. Could I have been mistaken in my impression of this girl, which was that she was hardboiled?

"Are you English?" she asked.

I said I was French. Yes, her eyes were decidedly grey. They brooded over me. I felt she disapproved of my being French.

"I nearly got engaged to a Frenchman once," she said thoughtfully.

"No?" I said. "My mother married one."

"I found he was only after my money."

"And that surprised you?"

She brooded.

"It wasn't nice, was it?" she said.

"Some men," I said brilliantly, "will do anything for money. Even Frenchmen."

"Particularly Frenchmen," she said.

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"You would have liked my father," I said.

"Why, was he disinterested?"

"Only in my mother, I'm afraid."

"Yes, that's the worst of Frenchmen. They treat women badly."

"Terribly," I said.

"And they have no respect for women."

"None at all," I said. "Isn't it awful!"

"They couldn't get away with it in America," she said. "Men respect women here."

"Oh, they do!" I said.

"American men," she said, "are chivalrous."

"It isn't chivalry so much," I said, "as downright and hideous fear."

"That's *not* true," she said.

"Oh, all right!" I said. "You tell me what you want me to say and I'll say it."

"What you mean is," she said, "that you don't like American women."

"No, I don't mean that at all. I am crazy about American women. Ask my sister-in-law Isabella."

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"But don't you think American women are much better-looking than European?"

"On the whole, yes. But let me think. Yes, on the whole they are. Oh yes, much! For one thing, American women have prettier legs."

"Legs are darn important," she said.

"They are jolly useful," I said.

"I meant long slim ones, silly. But you wouldn't marry an American girl?"

"Marry?" I said. "I don't think so. No, I don't think so."

"Why wouldn't you?"

"Well, you see, it's like this. I've got money of my own, you see. And if a Frenchman isn't marrying for money there is really no good reason why he shouldn't marry a Frenchwoman——"

"Oh, but there is! They dress so badly."

"That's true!" I said. "Fancy, I had never thought of that! But all the same, if ever I marry, I shall marry a Frenchwoman. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't *mind*," she said, "but don't

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say I didn't warn you. You will be making a great mistake."

"How did you come by such a profound knowledge of the French?" I asked. "Have you lived in Paris?"

"Have I lived in Paris? I have been exposed to humiliation in Paris, see."

"You probably saw too many Americans there. Paris is full of Americans exposing themselves to everything possible."

"I meant I was at school there. My mother's second husband was at the Bankers' Trust in the Place Vendôme."

"Your mother appears to be an instance of what good wives American women make once they have started marrying."

"Maybe you have met her—she is called Lady Abercraw now. Well, I don't suppose you would like her much. Mother is haunted."

"Naturally, with so many husbands paying alimony."

"No, by conviction and by destiny. It's a lot, isn't it? Well, it keeps her awfully,

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busy. Mother is absolutely convinced that she is destined to go through the world curbing the lower passions of men. She thinks men are quite dreadful underneath and that it's her mission to curb them. And the only way to do that is to marry them, see."

"And now you are going to be married?"

She smiled. Grey eyes, are you looking forward to wonderful things?

She said: "But I certainly shan't do any curbing."

"Your mother is quite right, you know. Men are dreadful underneath."

She laughed. Her teeth were delicious. Well, American dentists are the best in the world.

"How marvellous!" she said.

"It's easy to see you are in love."

"Do I look in love?"

"When you smile, yes. Other times you are rather thoughtful."

"That's because I've got loads on my mind. Do you think love is a happy state?"

"I don't know. I hope so."

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"Haven't you ever been in love?"

"I don't know," I said.

"How silly! No, really! How can anyone not know? And a Frenchman, too. I take back all I said about Frenchmen. I think they're nice, but they don't know anything about love. I'm quite certain I'm in love, anyhow."

"It's nice to be certain," I said.

She said: "You are laughing at me, but what do I care? I'm in love, see."

"Is he worthy of you?"

"He is the most attractive, most selfish and most helpless man in the world."

"And you are certain to marry him?"

"Well, I'm hanging on."

"I'm afraid you are going to be unhappy, my child."

She sat very still. Yes, she had a great deal on her mind.

She said: "We all have our reasons for everything, haven't we? Do you know why I am wearing these pants? Because father thinks Charlie is no good."

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"And is Charlie no good?"

"Why, he's wonderful!"

"There's music to that."

"Why, he's marvellous!"

"I'm beginning to think you quite like this fellow. But tell me this—how will your wearing pants make your father change his mind about Charlie being a bad match for a nice simple girl like you?"

"He locked me in my bedroom without any outdoor clothes so I couldn't get to Great Neck, so I got out of a window and took Joseph, thinking maybe I could get to a garage not far from here and hire a car, but I've never been on a horse but twice before in my life, see."

"You are lucky not to have broken your neck," I said.

"But I did so want to get to Great Neck to-night!"

I said: "You keep on saying Great Neck. What and where is Great Neck?"

"You don't know Great Neck? It's a loathsome place about five miles from

Port Washington and that's a couple of miles from here. Charlie has a divine house there, see, and he is giving one of his parties, and how do I know what he will be up to?"

"He needs watching, does he?"

"He needs to be kept in an iron cage, that's all. That's not because he is unfaithful, but because he's helpless."

"But, my child, is it imperative that you should marry this uncomfortable man?"

"And how do you think," she said, "I'm going to live without him?"

"Please be calm. I meant——"

"I'm going to marry Charlie, see."

"Very well. Anything to make you happy. Would you like me to drive you to this place called Great Neck?"

"Why, that's a swell idea! Will you really? But this simplifies everything . . . Only I can't let you take me there without first making a confession. It was a plant."

"What was a plant?"

"Falling off Joseph."

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"You plotted that?"

"See?"

"You were acting all the time?"

"Oh, your lights certainly scared us! But I'm not quite so wet behind the ears as I pretended——"

"Wet where?" I said.

"Not so dumb," she said. "I needn't have fallen into your arms and been carried into your car and acted soft and said 'Thank you, darling.'"

"So it was all a plot!" I said.

"Are you offended?"

"Oh no! Only profoundly hurt."

She said: "Darling!"

I said: "Now stop that."

She said: "Why, aren't you strong!"

"Now let's come down to facts. Why did you do all this?"

"But you know why! Because I wanted to get to Great Neck—at all costs."

"And why are you making this confession?"

"Because, of course, I still want to get

to Great Neck—but in a nice way, see.”

“I’ve a very good mind to let Joseph take you there.”

Her faint smile filled me with foreboding. Grey eyes, you know a lot, don’t you? And I saw my face reflected in her eyes with flattering distinctness. Well, she knew enough for that. I frowned.

“And what shall we do with Joseph?” I asked.

She smiled absently. She gave me the impression that everything was all right so long as everything was in my hands. That is to say, she was perfectly ready to take advantage of my folly in liking a pretty face by using me as her servant. Thus women, in the most natural way possible, prey upon the higher impulses of men.

Forcibly struck by her unworthiness of the love of a good man, I found myself smiling at her idiotically.

“Forgiven?” she murmured.

“Pretty girl,” I said, “will you marry me?”

"Why, I belong to another!" she cried.

"Thank God for that!" I said. "Now what shall we do with Joseph?"

"Joseph will trot home," she said. "The stables are quite near, and anyway they will be out looking for him."

Joseph, who had known her longer than I had, left her with pleasure. And they call horses our "dumb friends!" Not so dumb, I thought.

"Now for Great Neck," I said. "You must show me the way."

"It's not far. Let me drive."

"You are sure you feel up to it?"

Fumbling in her capacious trousers, she drew out a gleaming flask.

"Bit of luck this is," she said. "I wore these pants at a costume party months ago and some boy must have slipped this flask into the pocket. It's dry Martini, I think. Very vintage by now."

And she threw up her young face to the moon. The crisp evening air fell back before the fumes of gin. As she drank, she

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looked at me. I looked at her. Her eyes widening enormously, she lowered the flask.

"Why do you look like that?" she asked.

"Why?" I said. "Oh, I don't know. Perhaps because I'm bored."

"Bored?" she said.

She screwed on the stopper with practised fingers.

She said: "No Great Neck?"

I didn't say anything. I had said I was bored, and I was bored. One expects men to smell of coal, petrol, tobacco and alcohol. But feminine odours should be limited strictly to essentials.

She seemed preoccupied, staring down at the flask on her knees.

"Come, to Great Neck," I said, to get it over.

"No," she said.

"Oh, come *on*!" I snapped.

"No," she said.

And suddenly the smell of gin evaporated. What was this? Tears ran down her absurd

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cheeks. Well, this was a nice thing. Could they really be tears? Yes, they were tears. Then where was my hardboiled young friend in pants? Who was this new girl?

I said: "Look here . . ."

And she said: "Thank you for your offer to drive me to Great Neck."

I said: "Not at all. But look here——"

And she said: "But in the circumstances I never want to see you again—never!"

And she wrenched open the door of the car and jumped out and her brown curls danced savagely.

"Never!" she sobbed, and ran away down the road.

Was I well out of it? On the seat by me was the flask. On the floor was her hat. The hardboiled flask and the hardboiled hat. And out on the road was a little girl running away because a nasty man had been rude to her. It took thinking out.

"Here's your flask!" I called out.

Why not let the silly girl go? How stupid she was, with her flask and her pants!

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"Here's your hat!" I yelled.

The moon was making a great fuss of her as she ran down the road. How funny she looked! She couldn't manage those pants at all. From the back she looked exactly like Charlie Chaplin running. She kept on trying to hold her baggy pants up at the waist. She was not in good training, either. I ran after her, brandishing my silk handkerchief.

"Better tie this round your waist," I said.

She stared, gasping.

"Safer," I said.

She stood quietly while I tied the handkerchief as an additional belt round her waist. Then we walked back to the car. As she walked her head fell from side to side, as though the absurd thing was too heavy for her.

We climbed back into the car, she into the driving seat. She looked thoughtfully at the flask beside her. From one of her pockets she pulled out a screwed-up piece of paper,

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unfolded it, drew out a powder puff, and began powdering her nose.

"What is your name?"

"Marilyn. And I hate it, see."

"Why did you run away, Marilyn?"

"Because I'm tired of being disapproved of. First there's father, and then there's Charlie, and now there's you, and it's not right."

The profile, serene with the self-confidence that comes from self-pity, troubled me. This was not entirely because she had put too much powder on her nose, though that is always a moving spectacle in the young. I patted her curly hair. Poor child, no doubt she had been brought up badly.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"André."

She inclined her head towards my shoulder.

"Please, André, won't you be kind? I'm quite worn out, truly I am. Everyone is always disapproving of me, and it's not right. Men are such terrible jumpers at

conclusions. Look at how you jumped ! Formidable, I call it. I've never seen such a jump in my life. It's far from right to jump like that, André. Can't a girl take a little nip of something without men thinking she's a drunk ? And as a matter of fact I don't like drinking—not much, anyway. But people never stop disapproving of me."

"Then why," I asked, "don't you behave yourself? "

"Darling, do you think I could? "

"You might try," I said coldly. "And don't call me darling."

"But why not, when you are a darling? "

"I am not a darling," I said.

"Well, you're all I've got at the moment," she said and, taking the flask, she cast it into the outer darkness beside the road.

But I refused to be convinced, particularly as I noticed that she marked the place with a quick glance. Then she dug herself more comfortably into the angle of my shoulder. Her curly hair tickled my nose, and its

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perfume penetrated my senses, and my dislike of being imposed on made me restless.

“ Marilyn, what about starting for Great Neck ? ”

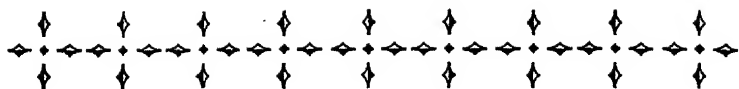
She said : “ Say what you like, this kind of thing makes a bond between two people.”

“ What kind of thing ? ”

She said : “ Mutual dislike.”

I said : “ Yes, but it’s bad for one’s golf.”

Thus, pending our dissolution and our salvation and our reincarnation on a better planet, we did our best to convince one another that it is permitted only to congenital idiots to make satisfactory companions in this world of sorrow.



• VII •

THE moon made a great fuss of her all the way to the place called Great Neck. They had quite a party, the moon and Marilyn. I, left out of it, had nothing to do but watch.

She smiled to herself. Well, it was not surprising. Oh, to be young, to be brave, to be hopeful, to be in love ! Was it any wonder that she smiled and that her heart leapt and sang ? Oh, to be young and to be in love ! My love is as deep as the sea, she sang, and my love is as red as a red, red rose. My love is as blue as the sky, she sang, and my love is as red as a red, red rose. Oh, to be young, to be defiant, to be fearless, and to match the bright new wings of love against the grinding wheels of time ! My love is as red as a red, red rose, she sang. And her dark curls danced. And she turned

up her face to the moon. It was no joke, as she was driving.

"Here !" I said.

"What ? "

"Why don't you look where you are going ? "

"I'm looking," she said.

"You're looking at the moon."

"Friend of mine," she said.

And the moon, appreciating the compliment, made no bones about giving the girl a good character. This struck me as very misleading. Drenching her face with its white light, the moon informed the world that she was as pure as a white, white lily.

I smiled sourly, recalling that she liked a drop of gin.

The moon, living up to its reputation as the World's Adverteyesment King, informed me that she was a clean straightforward girl with the highest possible ideals, a Lindbergh of girlhood.

Recalling that I had met her in pants

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and that she had schemed and said "darling" with hardboiled facility, I took the liberty to doubt it.

And the moon touched her grey eyes, saying: "Lo, of such is the choir of cherubim!" But I took the liberty to doubt that, too.

"Do you like moonlight, André?"

"No," I said.

"You *don't*! André, why ever not?"

"Because I am thirty-six years old and it frightens me."

"Are you superstitious, André?"

"If you must know, I am suspicious."

"Of the moon?"

"If you like," I said.

"André, how silly!"

Was it?

"The moon," I said, "is the most formidable of liars."

"I've heard that story before, André."

"Be warned in time, Marilyn. A bad man has only to turn up his face to the moon and it will be seen that he is really a child at

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heart and worthy of confidence. Countless women have been devoured in this way. American women in Europe are peculiarly susceptible to the moon. Thus they are devoured in large numbers by Frenchmen and Italians."

"Do you know, André, I am very old-fashioned about the moon. I think it makes everything romantic."

"That means you haven't listened to a word I have said."

"Are you romantic, André?"

"No, I am not."

"Funny! You are the only Frenchman besides Chevalier I have ever seen who even *looked* romantic. Are you sure you're not, André?"

"Let us understand one another, Marilyn. I am not romantic."

"Your little black moustache is, anyway. I like your little black moustache, André."

"You have been excessively badly brought up, my child."

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"Because I could use your little black moustache in a big way?"

"You are entirely without a sense of behaviour."

"Oh, am I! My father thinks I'm a lady, anyway. Of course he doesn't know much about ladies because he was a politician, see, and now he is retired he does nothing but read poetry. But you ought to meet my mother. She's a hell of a lady. English, you know. Smells of leather. Her husband has got swell teeth you can hang your hats on."

"Look where you are going, Marilyn."

"André, are you sorry you met me?"

"I am compelled to look on you as a vocation."

She said: "Does that mean I don't . . ."

"Exactly," I said.

"Don't you like me, André? I think you are nice."

"Marilyn, have you ever seen your face in the moonlight?"

"Does it make me look like a vocation, André?"

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“ It is even more misleading. You look adorable.”

“ Why, André, that’s exactly how I feel about your little moustache ! ”

Thus we drove to the place called Great Neck.



• VIII •

CRACK !
Beneath great arc-lamps men and women pursue one another, suddenly emerging from behind trees and shrubs, weapons ready in their hands.

Crack !

An elderly woman with white hair, her lined face tense in the sharp light, stooping, takes aim. A stout man in shirt sleeves, the lights shining on his spectacles, laughs savagely.

Crack !

From the darkness of the garden beyond emerge scowling figures, weapons held before them. They approach, undismayed by the howls that greet them. Stooping, they take aim.

Crack !

Painted wooden balls, surprised out of a

long tradition of old-world somnolence, are sent hurtling at each other with brutal energy.

Hail, America !

The once polite and languid game of croquet, devised to pleasure gentlefolk on the smooth lawns of the old world, has thus become a hard-hitting contest, to succeed in which, as in the warfare of Chicago gunmen, chicane and sleeplessness and stimulants and the will-to-win are essential.

"It's ten o'clock now," said a low pleasant voice beside me at the window. "They have been at it since three this afternoon."

"It looks very exciting."

"Sure. There are two thousand dollars in bets on that game."

"I can't make head or tail of it. Is anyone winning at the moment?"

"The side captained by the stout man in spectacles invariably wins. What he doesn't know about croquet is nobody's business."

"Who is he?"

"A dramatic critic."

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Wrenching my eyes from the maddened croquet players in the garden outside, I took in the man at my side. The large room was rent with screams and laughter, but my companion's low pleasant voice had prepared me for someone agreeable.

I saw a slight and slender man with smooth dark hair and a lean worn face. It was an attractive, leathery face. But it was not comfortable. When he was not smiling there was something sharp and harsh and reckless about him. But when he smiled he became queerly young and unsure, and he gave one the impression of being very tired from thinking the same thoughts over and over again. He had only one arm, and his movements had the faintly pathetic reckless swagger peculiar to slight one-armed men.

He said : " Aren't you Pierre de Saint-Cloud's brother ? "

" I am over here staying with them."

" His wife is said to be very kind and nice."

"She is all that."

"Yes. Pierre is here somewhere, you know."

"Here?"

"He often comes to these parties."

"Oh, does he!"

I looked around the crowded room. An uncommonly good time was being had by all. So Pierre was here? And he often came to these parties. Pierre? So this was one of the "business engagements" that so often deprived Isabella of his company in the evenings. I fancied she suspected the truth, too. Well, it was bad luck for Isabella. One imagined her trying so hard to ward off the encroaching loneliness of her life. No wonder she was so indefatigable socially.

"There's Pierre," my companion said.

"Do you want to speak to him?"

"Don't let's disturb him."

"Some people don't know when they are well off, do they, Saint-Cloud?"

I found myself liking my one-armed

companion, and said : " I gather from that you are not married."

The fellow's quick quivering smile was queerly at odds with his harsh leathery good looks. Untrustworthy bloke, I thought.

" Marriage is a mighty important step, Saint-Cloud. To me, anyway. I guess it's better to wait until one's certain."

" Does being certain do so much good ? Pierre's wife, you know, was quite certain."

" It's tough luck," he said.

I could see Pierre across the room, his dark handsome face alight, talking eagerly to a slight pretty girl whose virtue, one was permitted to see, was at the mercy of her generous impulses. Well, she was looking generously at Pierre. I was angry with him for being so indiscreet, for letting Isabella down so publicly.

" My name," said my one-armed companion, " is MacRae."

" Charlie MacRae ? "

Where did the fellow's attractively unsure smile come from ? There was nothing at all

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unsure about those keen eyes that seemed to bore right into you. But when he smiled you felt that here was a man who did not like himself at all. He was profoundly unreliable, it was obvious. An attractive, uncomfortable fellow.

Yes, it had been easy to guess that he was the "Charlie" of Marilyn's story. Is it not always thus? The man to whom another man is instinctively attracted, as I was attracted to MacRae, is more than likely to attract the same woman. What a nuisance it is, that one can't get away from these "samenesses!" All the men and women who may influence us in the course of our lives, no matter how dissimilar they may *seem* to be, have in their beings some profound affinity with each other. We may think we are being influenced or attracted, as we develop, by different people, but they all spring from the same root, all are branches of the same tree, in contrast to the other trees nearby whose branches shall never be explored by us. It is true

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we may be attracted by what are called our "opposites," but even the "opposites" that attract us will resemble one another in a profound, unalterable way.

MacRae thanked me for having given Marilyn a helping hand. He remarked that she was a crazy kid. I gathered that her coming had taken him by surprise. I apologised for intruding while he was giving a party.

And suddenly I found myself being very sorry for the girl Marilyn. Grey eyes was asking for trouble. No sensible woman would permit herself to fall in love with this dangerous handful of a MacRae. Too unreliable. Too confoundedly mysterious. Well, he was mysterious, just because you couldn't tell what he was up to. I tried to place him, but gave it up. He wasn't what is called a "gentleman" just because of that something harsh and sharp and grasping that was as though in the very texture of his face. No, he wasn't a comfortable companion.

"Like to join in a game of bridge, Saint-Cloud—or anything else?"

The crowd of young men and women made the vaguest impression on me. One was struck, as always, by their tireless capacity for playing games of every kind. They played, with serious enjoyment, every sort of game, bridge, poker, dice, anagrams, backgammon, Guggenheim, and never seemed to grow tired. The croquet players had come in from the garden and, instead of going to bed and sleeping for twenty-four hours, were being shepherded by the redoubtable dramatic critic into making up a game of poker.

I wondered where Marilyn was.

"You are surprised I am not drinking," MacRae said.

Was I? But that he expected me to be surprised was so obvious, that I said I was.

"Well, I'll tell you. This arm wasn't, as you might expect, lost in the war . . ."

There it was again, the fellow's queer fear of being taken for what he wasn't.

No, I must not think he had lost his arm in the war. I must not think that he was a gentleman—that would be coming soon. Well, and what the dickens was he, this leathery one-armed devil?

I found myself staring at four people playing bridge, in one of whom, a woman with untidy red hair and strong amusing features, I fancied I recognised Ruth Winslow, the great English comic actress who had recently conquered New York. Had I missed the point of MacRae's story about his arm or his not-drinking or whatever it was? How I hated having my attention insisted on by stories and anecdotes! Americans are always insisting on your attention with stories. They think nothing of button-holing you and telling you whole tissues of truth.

Turning to MacRae, I got the sudden untidy feeling one gets on having missed something essential right under one's nose. I hadn't heard a word of his wretched story. And now there he was at it again

with his absurdly helpless smile. Drat the fellow !

“ Yes,” I said.

“ It’s no joke, Saint-Cloud, losing an arm in a darn silly row like that.”

“ That’s true,” I said.

Those keen, boring eyes of his said : “ In me you see a man who knows what he’s about, a man you can’t fool.” And that absurdly quivering smile said : “ In me, my friend, you see a man who despises himself too much.” A nice restful companion. I wanted to say to him : “ What the dickens is up with you, MacRae ? Something has happened to you to-day, perhaps to-night. Something lovely or horrible, and you are frightened. You can’t help dramatising yourself, and you are frightened because the figure you make of yourself disgusts you.”

“ So I’ve never,” he said, “ touched a drop from that day to this.”

“ You have lost nothing,” I said. “ I don’t drink simply because I don’t like it.

Queer, isn't it? Where do you think young Marilyn is?"

"Changing, maybe. Someone spending the night here may have a spare dress. She looked cute in those pants, didn't she? Come, let's go find her."

He looked at me sharply. It was no joke, the way he looked right into you. What a man to try to borrow money from!

He said: "That kid has always had a tough break, Saint-Cloud."

"Yes? In what way?"

Those eyes went on boring into me.

"A girl's parents mean something to her, I guess? Her mother, particularly . . ."

"Of course," I said gloomily. Well, what did he expect me to say?

"If my mother had lived," he said deliberately, "I don't doubt but that I'd be a different man now."

"I've read," I said recklessly, "that the future of American civilization is in the hands of the mothers. Do you think that is true?"

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He said : " They are the best influence we have."

I could see that he believed it and that it made him happy to believe it. It consoled him and it gratified him and it exalted him and it humbled him to believe it. He felt better for believing it. Well, good luck to him. To me it seemed as fat-headed a generalisation as saying that the future of American civilization depended on the growth of banana-eating. But maybe it does. One needs to be a little light in the head to feel at home in this world. So maybe it is the light-headed generalisations that are the truest ones.

Since the word "mother" had been uttered, I had been conscious that my one-armed friend was weighing me. Well, I knew what he was about. This weighing business sometime or other happens to every stranger among the peoples of the conquering West. He was wondering if "beneath all this" I had a heart. "Mother" was the key word. Looking

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glum, I hoped the weighing process would end satisfactorily. I could not say that, if the history of the world has proved anything at all, it has proved that mother-love is the most perilous of all loves and that many of mankind's most pernicious ambitions have their roots in a mother's desire for the "best" for her children. But the "inspiring" mother theory has taken firm roots in American democracy. England, still rather pathetically trying to be a man's country, is not so great on mothers. In France they talk less about their mothers but live in the same houses with them, which is more than Americans do if they can help it. Still, it is absurd to call anything so deeply rooted as the American "mother" theory "hypocritical." It is a very helpful and practical theory, too. For American men would become self-conscious if they realised the truth, that as a race of men, and in spite of the narrowing influences and purely local "inspiration" and tiresome domination of their women,

they are broader in thought and more active for the world's good than any other race of men in the world.

I said : " I fancy I should offer you my congratulations, MacRae. I understand you and Marilyn are engaged to be married."

I was quite unprepared for what happened. MacRae looked as though he had been hit between the eyes.

" Jesus ! Did she tell you that ? "

Regretting that the influence of mothers had not, to offset its many failures, killed that offensive expletive, I said coldly : " I have certainly not invented it."

" The crazy kid ! "

It was very uncomfortable. He looked unutterably wretched.

" Did she say anything else, Saint-Cloud ? "

" Only that she seemed to fancy her father wasn't your best friend."

What made the fellow interesting was his air of desperate helplessness, as of a man who was certain that he was unworthy to

attain the least of his desires. This is a very attractive form of helplessness. It was easy to see how, in spite of himself, he entrapped and was entrapped by women.

He said: "You must think you have stepped into a madhouse, Saint-Cloud. Shall we go and find Marilyn now?"

What had I done? Had I got the girl into trouble with the man she loved?

"MacRae, you won't, of course, say that I . . . eh?"

"But, my dear fellow, it's true!"

Confound the man! It was true, was it?

"In that case, MacRae, let me remind you that you have not yet thanked me for my good wishes."

"Nor I have! Thanks a lot, Saint-Cloud."

"Good. Now shall we go?"

"This way—we go upstairs. Marilyn should be dressed like a human being by now."

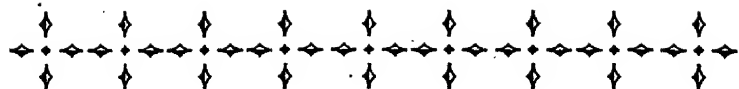
"I wonder," I said, "if I shall regret those pants."

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"Oh, Marilyn is a swell dresser when her mind's on it. She will have done her best for you, Saint-Cloud. I guess she has taken quite a fancy to you. Maybe you remind her of Jack Barrymore as Don Juan."

"Maurice Chevalier," I said, "if it's all the same to you."

"But it's your little black moustache she likes, Saint-Cloud."



• IX •

AND we went upstairs and came to a small eighteenth-century room, panelled in light unpolished oak. Ah, how well I knew these small high Louis Quinze salons! It was a beautiful room and an elegant room and an exceedingly expensive room. The interior decorator had had a nice time in this room. The man responsible for the indirect lighting—probably a Frenchman or a Russian—must have had a nice slice of the loot, too. It was the sort of room you had to be crazy about. There they all were, the dear old properties of vanished Europe, the dear old inevitable slender bits and pieces, and of course the Louis Quinze mantelpiece, the colour of dead roses, and of course the curtains of old lampas, pale blue and cream, with Chinese motives after Boucher, and of course the marquise covered in silk, broché

de Philippe de Lassalle, and the fauteuil signed by Cresson, covered in old velvet, bleu de roi. An evocation of the past? Oh, dear me, these charming toys did not look so self-conscious in the candle-lit past, not so important, not so very collected. And they had the great advantage, too, in the days of Louis XV, of not looking so insufferably and tiresomely Louis Quinze.

And in this exquisite salon we came upon two women talking earnestly. One sat on a tabouret (petit point, of course) at the feet of the other, and a dark head was uplifted to a fair head. Were they playing confidences? They were not old, and I did hope the interior decorators had not got at them, but they looked, in spite of their modern clothes, much more Louis Quinze than the room. For they were two women talking together, and two men had disturbed them, and that must have happened in the candle-lit past, too.

Following MacRae, I hesitated in the doorway. Was Marilyn here? Was dark

head Marilyn? And in the sudden unquiet silence of the ladies' broken confidences a faint perfume distilled into my consciousness a memory . . . not of Marilyn, whom I had met but a few hours before . . . then a memory of whom?

The two ladies stirred, as though helpless in an unwelcome current of air. Yes, they had been playing confidences. Four eyes, unexpectant and thoughtful, regarded us. So dark head was Marilyn, then. How extraordinary! How strange! How charming! Why, this was an adventure! I recognised her by her grey eyes. Grey eyes, what are you up to now, so quiet and thoughtful? And they looked at us calmly. Too calmly, I thought. She prefers dealing with the moon, I thought, to dealing with men and women.

"Ladies," said MacRae—stupidly, I thought, "have we your permission to join you?"

"Of course, dear sillies!"

I was conscious that that voice, like the

perfume, was an emanation from the past. Oh, the past ! This new Marilyn absorbed my attention. Where was my hardboiled young friend in pants ? Where was cry-baby ? Oh, to be young and to be in love and to sing that my love is as red as a red, red rose ! But where was that brave singer now ? Impenetrable and incalculable in the delicate armour of her feminine dress, and far too calm in the presence of her elders, she rose from the stool where she had been sitting at her companion's feet. And her companion's confidences, one felt, had not been amusing. But Marilyn managed to present a not too improbable smile.

"André, don't you recognise your new friend in these clothes ?"

I knew where I was now. The voice was the same, anyhow. Faintly husky, it had become the pretty boy very well, and now it became the girl not too badly.

"You have borrowed very well, Marilyn."

"It's Chanel, honey. Oh yes, I've got

awful smart friends. Maybe you know this one, too—if only you'll look at her."

A woman's laugh, as though drenched with that remotely faint perfume, overwhelmed me. Oh, that dear, silly laugh! But how could I have been so stupid? Sheila! Fair head, Marilyn's companion, was Sheila.

"What are you doing here, Sheila?"

"What are *you* doing here, André?"

"So this is how you spend your time!"

"While you, André, go about waylaying pretty girls on the highroad—well, that's a nice way to behave!"

And as we embraced, Sheila's china eyes smiled warmly into mine. Well, weren't we old, tried friends? And, too, what about that uprising glow of affection between two foreigners in a strange country? Is there anything else that so clearly reveals the nearness of our tribal instincts?

"André, how nice to see you again! Do you think I have changed? I think I have grown stouter. What do you think?"

"I think so too, Sheila."

"Oh, André, you beast!"

How pleasant, in a country where the patience and forbearance and timidity and boredom of men have inspired women with a conviction of superior intelligence, to meet a charming woman who knew she was an idiot! But an idiot, you know, in the grand manner, the radiant idiot with the hair of spun gold and long liquid eyes and all the other tricks of the englamouring trade. Well, I thought, it's nice to see Sheila again. And I thought, what is Sheila up to now, why is she so radiant?

I turned to MacRae, and the fellow was smiling at Sheila and me as though his life depended on his smiling.

Well, men know each other, for what that knowledge is worth. So I knew that the fellow was trying his damndest not to feel jealous of Sheila's intimacy with me. And this was Marilyn's intended? Grey eyes, what a packet of trouble you have taken on! And she knew it now, too; she had

just found it out. This was a nice way for a girl to come to a party.

And suddenly I felt so angry with Sheila I could have slapped her. So I smiled at her. She, thinking I was being the kind and sympathetic old friend, gave the show away in her answering smile, for what was that shy and foolish fluttering but the wings of the butterfly about to rest on a flower? Oh, the devil! Knowing I had guessed her new infatuation, the stupid creature flushed and pulled a face at me.

MacRae said: "Care for a drink, Marilyn?"

So, then, everything was lovely in the garden and the fellow knew Sheila well enough to know she did not drink.

Marilyn said: "No, thank you, Charlie."

I looked at her gloomily. She gave me a vague smile. Was I a man or an orange? She seemed to be uncertain about it. I thought of the comic figure in pants running down the moonlit road because a rude man had spoken sharply to her.

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And here was a tall girl, slender as a daffodil on its stalk, calm and poised and absent, and apparently uncertain whether she would vanish into thin air or stay where she was. She decided at last and sat down on another footstool, this time at MacRae's feet. Well, he was the centre of her being, and she could not for long keep away from him.

MacRae, his worn leathery face becomingly framed against the high back of the fauteuil of old velvet, bleu de roi, was looking at me thoughtfully. He was not, of course, thinking of anyone but himself. That was the fellow all over. But let me make myself clear. It was in the most sympathetic manner possible that he was absorbed in himself. His utter selfishness didn't offend—not, anyhow, in its outward aspect. It did not offend because it wore so delicate an air. Confound the fellow ! His grasping egotism flowered, on the surface, into a look of desperate helplessness. Flowered, mark you. Well, he was lucky. For what is

there that charms us so irresistibly as the air of helplessness of a successful man ?

Sheila, of course, was too stupid to hear, in that small room, a confounded jangle of contacts. And so she said : " Why, will someone tell me, are we so quiet in here ? "

" I'm afraid," I said, " we interrupted you and Marilyn. What, I wonder, were you two talking about so seriously ? "

Sheila patted the marquise on which she was sitting as an invitation to me to sit beside her. Trust Sheila, of course, not to know when you were detesting her.

" Why, about you, André ! " she said.

" Didn't you know," MacRae smiled, " that it's Sheila's vocation to say the right thing ? "

Marilyn lit a cigarette. She looked just as though she had that moment arrived from distant parts in an aeroplane. That is to say, she looked bright and talkative.

" First time I met Sheila," she said, " I knew it was all up with this baby. She is just Charlie's type."

MacRae said gently : " And what is my type, Marilyn ? "

" The gold and ivory woman of Babbitt's dreams," Marilyn said.

MacRae chuckled. You could sort of hear him thinking that she was a great kid. Sheila gave a nervous little laugh. She did not, of course, know what it was all about, but she felt that American girls, even when they were as nice as Marilyn, were a little extraordinary, unexpected, saying such odd things.

" And what," I asked Sheila, " were you telling Marilyn about me when we came in ? "

" Just how kind you were, dear. Oh yes, and I said you had never been in love. Are you angry with me, André ? "

" Well, you might have tried to make me out a little more interesting."

She gave MacRae a dazzling smile. Oh, she was a perfect idiot !

" It's comfortable not interesting friends one wants in life, dear."

MEN DISLIKE WOMEN

And so, I thought, you have chosen to fall in love with this confounded MacRae. You are a nice one to talk about wanting comfortable friends.

But her last remark had been too much of a strain for Sheila. Routine remarks were what she liked.

"Don't you think," she asked, "that my dress suits Marilyn beautifully?"

Marilyn was still on her tabouret, her hands clasped across her knees. And the tabouret was, of course, at MacRae's feet. He caught my glance, and for a young girl's romantic hero he looked far from happy. Well, serve him right. Marilyn never stirred, never looked up. But she was very busy.

"You smoke a lot, don't you, Marilyn?" I said.

"Just try to stop her!" MacRae said.

"So bad for young people!" Sheila said.

"When I've got a lot on my mind," Marilyn said, "I smoke a lot, see."

"Charlie, wake up, do!" Sheila sighed. Sheila had a maddening way of talking in sighs when she was distressed. Distressed? It was clear that I had fallen amongst people who were determined to let nothing stand in the way of their spending a thoroughly miserable evening. Was it for this I had escaped from dear Isabella? Was it for this I had come to Great Neck? Was it for this . . . Gloomily, I helped myself to a thimbleful of whisky and a large quantity of White Rock. Sheila, knowing I detested the stuff, looked surprised and hurt.

"Why, André, have you taken to drinking?"

"Who, me?"

"Yes, dear, you . . . of all people!"

"Why shouldn't I drink?"

"But you *never* drink, André!"

"Isn't America," I said, "the land of opportunity?"

My annoyance with Sheila had blinded me to the fact that it was impossible to annoy Sheila—except, of course, by attacking

the English public-school system. And who would want to do that, with English public-school men everywhere showing us what self-educated men can do?

I said: "My dear Sheila, a man must do what he can to amuse himself."

"Of course, dear, but how will it amuse you if you are sick?"

Marilyn's dark curly head was against the fellow's knee. The fingers of his one hand played idly in her hair. A charming picture! Fortified by one sip of the detestable whisky, I found myself compelled to disapprove not only of Great Neck but of everyone at Great Neck. O insufferable Great Neck!

"Who," I asked, "could be amusing in such an emotional atmosphere?"

"Emotional?" said Marilyn. And she lit another cigarette. "Who is being emotional?"

"I am," I said bitterly.

MacRae smiled, as he might at someone he liked, confound his impertinence.

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"I'm sorry," he said, "that you are not having a good time."

"I have never enjoyed a party less, MacRae."

"Isn't that too bad !"

"Marilyn got me to come to this party," I said, "on the understanding that I was to enjoy myself. I am not enjoying myself. But what makes me indignant is that I was feeling rather attractive, and that doesn't happen to an unattractive man more than once in a lifetime. And now look at me !"

"It's a darn shame," Marilyn said. "I was feeling attractive, too. We might get together, André."

"Oh, to fall apart !" I said.

Sheila sighed.

"It's the whisky, André. I'm sure it is upsetting you."

"It's you and MacRae who are upsetting me, Sheila."

Having hit the nail a snappy blow below the belt, just to make certain of my effect, I prepared myself to enjoy the consequent

consternation. But nothing went right with this party. A helpless look passed between Sheila and MacRae. That was good, so far. Then I realised the nature of Marilyn's latest contribution to an agreeable evening at the homes of the rich. Taking my words to heart, she was falling apart before our eyes. Well, she had decided to have her cry and be damned to everyone.

"The girl is quite right," I said. "Let them have it, Marilyn."

But she was crying very quietly. It was most unsatisfactory. She did not let them have it at all. The tears just tumbled ever so fast from between her closed eyelids, and her lips were ever so tightly caught between her teeth. It was all most restrained. I knelt down beside her, and took her half-smoked cigarette from between her fingers, and then I didn't know what to do with it.

"Here's an ashtray," MacRae said.

I glared at him.

"Marilyn," I said, "wouldn't you prefer to come out and cry in the stolen Packard?"

You know you enjoy crying there. And this is a horrible little room—isn't it, MacRae?"

"Louis Somebody," MacRae said. "Set me back fifteen grand. Sure, I've always disliked it."

"You see, Marilyn?"

"But I love this room!" she sobbed. "I've been so happy in this room."

"Nonsense, my child. No one could be happy in this room but an interior decorator. Face the facts, Marilyn. If you must cry, cry in the stolen Packard. And here, drink this."

It was detestable whisky, but how would an American know?

"But you said I mustn't drink, André!"

"This is no time for idle flattery, Marilyn."

"It's not flattery. It's because I like your little black moustache."

"Then drink this," I said severely, and to my relief she finished off the beastly stuff at a gulp. Giving me back the glass, she

pressed my hand gratefully. I had now, it appeared, become a friend of the family.

"My bag," she said. "On the table over there."

I gave her the bag, and she began making up her face. I turned on Sheila, intending to show my disapproval of her in a big way. And she began making up her face.

"Now you cry," I said bitterly.

"Yes, dear," she said.

And she did, the stupid creature.

I looked helplessly at MacRae. He gave his twisted little grin.

"Lovely evening!" I said.

"You're a good man at a party, Saint-Cloud! Now you've made Sheila cry."

"*I've* made her cry! I like that!"

"Yes, you have," Sheila said. "You think it's all my fault, André."

"All I think," I said reasonably, "is that it's peculiar that you and MacRae, who are after all grown-up people, should find nothing better to do than make this child miserable."

Marilyn stopped powdering her nose and gave me a cold look.

"Who's a child?" she said.

"Now don't you begin again," I said.

"Well, who's a child?"

"Well, you are."

"Oh, am I!"

"Now start crying again," I said bitterly.

"Swell party!" MacRae said.

Marilyn laughed disdainfully and went on powdering her nose.

"He calls me a child!" she said.

"And you are dead right, Saint-Cloud," MacRae said.

Marilyn gave him a cold look.

"Why is he right?" she said.

"We won't go into that now," MacRae said.

"It's your turn to start crying now, MacRae," I said.

Marilyn sniffed and began making up her lips. Sheila was now busy on her lips, too.

"I think I'll have a shave," I said.

"Everyone else seems to be making improvements."

"They have got something to work on," MacRae said.

"You're a nice one to talk!" I said. "Playing fast and loose with a young girl's romantic affections."

"He's betrayed me," Marilyn sighed, "almost."

"The things girls say!" Sheila said.

"Almost," said Marilyn dreamily. "That's what makes a girl sore."

I was watching Sheila. She gave MacRae a long, absent-minded look. It was intolerable. These silly women appeared to have no existence apart from the fellow. Marilyn, for example, sitting at his feet, was dreamily permitting him to fondle her cheek. It would have shown, one felt, a proper feeling on her part to bite the hand that fondled her. But the girl put up with everything. And she appeared to have forgotten all about me.

"I am going home," I said. "My

sister-in-law Isabella does not like me to be out too late."

Sheila looked at me with blank astonishment. Well, that was more or less her usual expression. Of course, she and MacRae did not want to be left alone with Marilyn. It was an uncomfortable situation for them, and serve them right.

"But, André, it's only midnight!"

"I have to be up early in the morning."

"You? Early! But why?"

"I can't tell you that till I have looked in my engagement book."

"André, *you* with an engagement book!"

"My sister-in-law Isabella insists on it."

"But do you do everything she tells you?"

"To-night is the only time I haven't," I said, "and I wish I had."

"Dear André, how you have changed since you left Paris."

"It's you who are changed, Sheila."

"Me? Changed! How?"

"You are stouter," I said.

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"Oh, André, you beast ! And I'm not, either. But you've changed like anything, André."

"It's quite simple, Sheila. I am now living more in accordance with my position."

"But, darling, you never had a position before ! What on earth do you do with it ?"

"I just take it round with me to houses approved by Isabella. It's quite simple. She plans everything out for me, and I have a perfectly marvellous time."

MacRae said : "Why not join us some evenings, Saint-Cloud ?"

"And have some more lovely parties like this ?" I said. "Thank you, thank you !"

"He's got such a divine apartment !" Sheila sighed, worshipping, like a good Englishwoman, the benefits of money.

"Well, good-night all," I said.

Marilyn was looking up at me thoughtfully. What a lot that girl had on her mind ! Grey eyes, what are you up to now ?

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"Before you go," she said, "may I ask you something, André?"

"Look here," I said, "why can't you leave me alone?"

"Okay," she said.

"Now you've hurt the kid's feelings," MacRae said.

"I was only going to ask you a little question," Marilyn said sulkily. "Will you marry me?"

"Who, me?" I said.

"Yes, you," she said.

I walked to the door.

"Of course, I must first ask my sister-in-law Isabella. Thank you for asking me. Good-night."

Sheila was looking at me with a high colour.

"André, I think you are being beastly—beastly!"

I slammed the door of the room behind me. I went down the stairs. I looked for my hat. There were a great many hats there. How was I to find my hat? I went

upstairs again, and opened the door of the small high room.

"I can't find my hat," I said.

Sheila looked at me coldly.

"Imagine our embarrassment!" she said.

I stood in the doorway. Marilyn looked at me dreamily.

"You shouldn't be so impromptu," I said.

"It's very disturbing. And so now I can't find my hat."

"Pique," Marilyn said, "is a darn bad adviser."

"True," I said. "Too true. Good-night, Marilyn."

"Good-night, André. I hope you find your hat."

"If you will dine with us to-morrow night," MacRae said, "I'll come down and help you find your hat."

"It's a bet," I said. Well, this meant good-bye to Isabella and the right people. There was certainly nothing right about this soft-spoken leathery MacRae. He was probably a most awful cad. God's gift to

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women. Why on earth had I said I would dine with him? And what on earth would Isabella say?

MacRae helped me to find my hat.

"Glad you came," he said, shaking my hand.

"Now look here, MacRae," I said, "don't you start trying to make things easier for yourself by making a match between Marilyn and me."

We stood smiling at each other.

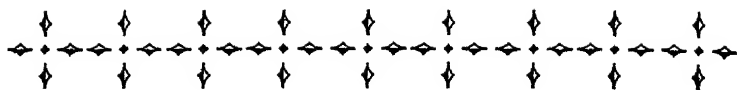
"It's not such a bad idea at that," he said.

"I don't like the way you say that, MacRae."

The fellow's eyes snapped at me.

"You'd be a lucky bastard to get her," he said.

"Attaboy!" I said. Well, one had to get some fun out of their confounded language.



• X •

OUTSIDE in the stolen Packard I found Pierre kissing a girl. He was at the wheel and the girl was standing by the car and did not see me. She was the same girl I had seen looking generously at him. She was very pretty with the prettiness of a piece of nonsense. Beneath her thin frock you could see little pointed breasts. Her eyes were shining. You could see she was having a first-class time.

“Good-night, dear,” she said. “Good-night, dear Pierre.”

Pierre saw me and drew his head away. She stared, and giggled. Then she looked at me coldly.

“Sorry,” I said.

“My brother,” Pierre said sulkily.

“His elder and wiser brother,” I said.

She whispered into Pierre’s ear, laughed

nervously, and, with silly twinkling knock-kneed legs, ran back into the house.

I climbed into the car, not looking at Pierre. He and my father made a nice pair.

"So it was you who pinched my car," Pierre said.

We were back at school again.

"Yes, you little beast," I said. "And you've got lip-rouge on your mouth."

A girl stood framed against an upstairs window and called out: "Good-night, André. Thanks loads for the buggy ride."

"Your girl?" Pierre said. "Or snitched, like my car?"

"My vocation," I said. "And if she was my girl, what of it? I haven't, like you, got a girl at home. Though she is much too good for you."

Pierre did vicious things to his gear-box.

"That's just the trouble," he said. "You try marrying a woman too good for you, and see how you like it. It's no joke, my dear. Even American husbands, who put

up with as much from their wives as we at home do from our mistresses, don't always stand the course."

"Be a good fellow and shut up," I said.

"I want to think."

"Wanting's not everything," Pierre said.

"And let me remind you again," I said, "that lip-rouge doesn't suit you."

"Oh, shut up!" Pierre said.

The moon had gone down. We drove on through the blue-washed darkness. How on earth was I to break it to Isabella that I was leaving her house and going to stay at an hotel? But I simply could not go on staying with her and at the same time see people who offended her. It was not because she was a snob they offended her, but because she was a woman with a standard of conduct.

It appalled me to think what Isabella would think of Marilyn.

"Know a girl called Marilyn?" I asked.

"Marilyn Fox? Yeah," said Pierre, who had adopted the hustling American habit of

drawling out the affirmative in preference to the dilatory English way of clipping out "Yes."

"What are her people?" I asked.

"Peter Fox was Mayor of New York before the war. He began well, but his administration turned out to be the most corrupt the city has ever had, and that is saying something. They say MacRae had a hand in that."

"What is that fellow?"

"He is a big operator on the market—that's about all anyone knows for certain. They say curious things about him. He is supposed to have a hand in almost everything crooked, from bootlegging to street-car and transit contracts. But no one knows for certain."

"Yes, but what is his actual profession?"

"He runs a laundry."

"He runs a what?"

"You see, André, all these big shots like MacRae have a respectable business. Some of them even run flower-shops. MacRae's

laundries do very well, I believe. But probably he is only the nominal owner."

How Isabella was going to despise me ! But what bothered me was, how it hurt her that I, whom she banked on for a friend, should prefer such shady company. She was lonely, and now I was slinking away, too.

Realising how fond I had grown of Isabella, I glanced at Pierre. He looked sulky. Pierre, you are a dirty dog. You have no heart and no self-discipline, all you have is a handsome face, a quick brain and an eye for the main chance. So you married Isabella, and a fine mess you are in now. Pierre, you are like your father and your grandfather and all his fathers before him, the scum of the world sitting on the top of the world, but now you are being kicked off the top of the world because birth has gotten on the world's nerves. Pierre, you are a dirty little sneak and a poor helpless silly unhappy kid.

Yes, I understood Pierre, for I understood

myself. He did not enjoy deceiving Isabella. He knew her superiority to him, and was ashamed that he could not run the course. Pierre was not, like our fine father, just an "amusing" cad. His Jewish blood had given him a conscience. "We needs must love the finest when we see it." Alas, if that were true! But what is true is, as Goethe said, that the only approach we have to someone who is superior to us is through love.

Thus Pierre had approached Isabella Van Asprey, uniting himself to her finer being through love. Only by loving her could a sly clever man like Pierre endure a woman's superiority to him. So he had tried, and now he had failed. But he could not take this failure casually. And it was just because he could not that Isabella still clung to her love for him and hoped he would come back to her.

Poor Pierre and Isabella! If only he were vile enough, as our "amusing" father would have been, to think of Isabella's

superiority as a "tiresome" one, he could have just laughed at her and sneaked his fun quite happily and she could have divorced him with a steady heart. But her love clung to the sulky shamefaced boy in him. And Pierre, with his half-Jewish perception of good where there is good, could not help but admire in Isabella her disinterestedness, the fact that she was not always—like our poor mother—hoping for something for herself, the fact that she could do things from faith and belief and no other motive at all.

Happily it turned out, in the course of the next few days, to be fairly easy to take my leave of Isabella's hospitality and remove my belongings to the recently built Savoy Plaza. All I had to do was to put my cards on the table, and, as neither Isabella nor I had card-minds, she understood.

I said: "Isabella, you are an angel, and I can't bring myself to deceive you any longer. No man," I said, thinking of Pierre, "could deceive you and retain his

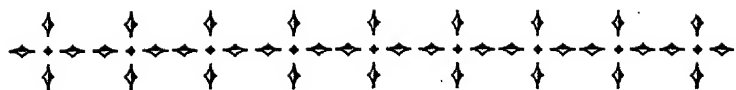
self-respect. Isabella, I have been a hypocrite with you. I have lived in your house under false pretences. I have gone where you have told me to go, I have dined where you have told me to dine, I have gone with you to plays by Eugene O'Neill in eighteen acts telling us of the death of Queen Anne, I have shaken hands with every celebrity, both native and foreign, I have met the first ladies and gentlemen of America, and I have hated every moment of it. Isabella," I said, "forgive me. But what am I to say? I have low tastes, my dear, and I am only happy in low company. People who run laundries, for example. I have nothing whatsoever against the right people, in fact I regard them with respect and admiration, but if I have to lunch and dine with them I regard them as an infliction, an abomination, and a bore. Do you ever get that feeling? Yes? No? Dear Isabella," I said, "I am a tramp by inclination, and not even you, whom I am so fond of, can ever change me."

And she understood, and we remained friends, and I never shall forget the tears that lurked in her clear eyes even while she laughed helplessly and said : " André, you are impossible, quite impossible. You are no more a tramp than I am, but it is your particular affectation to think you are. Of course, dear, you must do as you please. You are absurd, André, but something tells me that you will always be my friend."

And now that my life in New York was to take me amongst those whom Isabella's fine standards would not tolerate, the time has come to say good-bye to her. I am glad to have known Isabella. And when I recall my petty exasperation with her I realise how far I am from being a decent citizen of this world. For that is what Isabella was. She thought, of course, that she was above all an American and a proud American. But that is the little joke that God (or is it their shyness?) plays on decent people. He permits them to think they are French, English, or American,

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or German, and to be proudly so. But when their dossiers come to be read out before the courts of time it will probably be found that many commonplace men and many gentle women like Isabella never, outside of their daily routine, thought anything or did anything in their lives that hadn't as its fundamental impulse a shy and perhaps inarticulate but universal aspiration. That is big writing, of course, like saying the East for the east, and though big writing is fun at times it does not really say anything. All this big writing about Isabella only means that I loved and admired her no end.



• XI •

AND so, coming down with a bang, we come to Pete Fox, ex-Mayor of New York, one of those Americans of whom by far the greatest is the fallen archangel that kicks up the dust of God's Country from Manhattan to California, Mr. William Randolph Hearst, and of whom Americans travelling in Europe deprecatingly say that they are not "representative."

Mr. Fox was a tall, "husky," handsome, white-haired old man. I put husky between inverted commas because it is one of those hearty words that make you think of the world as a great soiled bladder which one good breath of sincerity will cause to explode—but which one good breath of sincerity somehow doesn't. No man in America has been debunked more often or more continuously than Pete

Fox, but who can debunk a natural force ?

In short, Mr. Fox looked as I imagined the late President Harding must have looked. But no doubt Mr. Fox was huskier. It went without saying that, since he had been Mayor of New York, he was spoken of as unspeakably corrupt, in the same way that European diplomats used to be known as "suave." Certain words become fashionable about certain professions. It appears to be fashionable among Americans to think of their politicians as being "lousy with graft," whatever that may mean.

No one, however, had ever denied that Pete Fox was a decidedly agreeable companion. He might be a dirty man to cross, but no one had ever denied that he was a good sport. Pete Fox laughed at the laws of his country, and his country laughed with him. Such are the advantages of being a good sport in a country that takes its sense of humour seriously. Yes, in his day Mr. Fox had been as popular as Mr. James Walker and Mr. Albert (or Alfred ?) Smith

have been in ours. Good sports to a man.

The handsome old man greeted me amiably, my card in his hand. He was in shirt sleeves. In one hand, his thumb marking the page, he held a slim blue book. His manners were charming. The book was the Poems of Austin Dobson.

"What can I do for you, sir? If you have come for an interview, let me tell you right now that I'm out of everything."

"It's very kind indeed of you to see a complete stranger, Mr. Fox."

"Sit down, sit down. I'm fond of company, stranger or no. I don't get much company these days. Care for a drink?"

Mr. Fox carefully laid his book down and helped himself from a bottle of Johnnie Walker by his side. I think it was the first and only bottle of Johnnie Walker I saw in America, where bottles of whisky commonly bear names that would strike a Scotsman as peculiar. He drank from one of those collapsible paper cups which are, I believe,

hygienic. The contents of the paper cup gulped down, he threw it into the empty fireplace to join others that had already fulfilled their hygienic destiny.

The room we sat in was large, comfortable and unpretentious. Pete Fox, for all his ill-gotten millions, had always kept in character, had never tried to be modern or artistic or social. He was a natural force and he didn't care who knew it. So he sat in his shirt sleeves and read poetry. It was, after all, a pretty good way to live. There was a revolving book-case near his chair filled with well-thumbed volumes. They were all poetry, conservative poetry.

The summer sunlight lay brightly on the park outside. In this park I had first met Marilyn. Where and how, I wondered, was Joseph? Yes, husky handsome Pete Fox must cut a fine figure on husky handsome Joseph. Two real good sports together.

The cunning blue eyes searched me keenly. Pete Fox let you know he could size a fellow up. But I didn't believe he

could. I didn't believe he was any good at sizing people up. Maybe he knew a good poem when he read one, but I could have sworn he was no judge of men. The keenness of those eyes was a forced keenness. But he had bluffed himself into thinking he could, and maybe he had bluffed others, too. Rich rank blood stirred in this old man, and at the same time there was something honest and open and sympathetically weak about him. Poetry, graft, and Johnnie Walker. Well, so things go.

"You're French, I suppose?"

"Half American, Mr. Fox."

"Is that so?"

"My mother was a Schvengenstein."

Pete Fox threw back his handsome old head and roared with laughter.

"So that's left you nice and comfortable, eh? Fine, fine!"

Listening to his laughter one seemed to hear a million real good fellows roaring out: "Good old Pete!" He was decidedly the sort of man who could always give a bunch

of real good fellows the illusion that they were having a swell time.

"Then you're over here just to have a good time, Count? Well, that's fine. It's a grand city, New York—yes, sir, a grand city! I'm glad you've had a good time, Count. That's fine, fine! Here, you are not drinking!"

"I wonder," I said, "if after I've said what I've come to say, you will kick me out."

The laughter of Mr. Fox, for all its volume, came as easily to him as gurgling to a child. In short, it was a natural force. One had a vision of Pete Fox slapping backs all the way down the corridors of his public life, forever drowning criticism in laughter that seemed to come from his great tough guts but was seldom reflected in his cunning blue eyes. Yes, he was a crafty old boy. But I wondered if that had done him much good.

"Pete Fox has gotten tame now—I'm an old man, sir. An old, old man. Well, go

ahead, though I'm getting a great kick out of wondering just why you've come."

"I have come to see you about your daughter, Mr. Fox."

"Say, do *you* know Marilyn? Fine, fine! I'd no idea she had ever met a gentleman."

"I have only known her a few weeks. But I have grown very fond of her."

Old Pete Fox, his great freckled red hands spreadeagled on his knees, leant forward as though to examine me. The blue eyes, bright with amusement though they were, never for a moment lost their bluffing quality of looking right into you.

"Adolphe Menjou, sir," he said, "put me out of my anxiety right now. Are you after making my Marilyn a Countess? Now don't have any secrets from her old dad. You want to marry my Marilyn?"

"I'm afraid I must disappoint you, Mr. Fox."

He laughed so long that, looking at his great suffused face, I feared some harm would come of it.

"And you're not far wrong, Count—I certainly am disappointed. I don't know where in hell you come from, but you look quite regular to me, in spite of your fancy title. Yes, sir. Mind, I don't say I'd let Marilyn marry you. But I'd like to know that a decent young fellow with money of his own was courting her—sure, I would. Marilyn will have a big fortune—did you know that?"

"The reputation you have, Mr. Fox, is not that of a poor man."

"Yes, sir, Marilyn will have a very big fortune. And you say you know her. Well, do you know what she does? Say, listen. What does she do but see muck, just plain muck, day in and day out? Muck, eh? That's my Marilyn, young man. Likes muck."

He roared with laughter. It sounded horrible.

"It's a fine life, Count—as long as a man can laugh. Muck, eh? Well, that's what we all come from and go to, isn't it? But

you should have seen my Marilyn a few years ago when she got back from Paris—there wasn't a prettier or a sweeter kid in the world. You'd have had a big kick out of seeing her then, Count. You see this house? Well, it's certainly no summer bungalow, is it? My little Marilyn brightened it up so you thought you was living in a little shanty with every window wide open. Well, to hell with all that. Have a drink, young man. Here I sit and laugh, do you see." With a steady hand he poured himself some whisky, raised the paper cup to his lips and said solemnly: "The first to-day—with this hand."

"Why don't you give Marilyn a fair deal, Mr. Fox?"

The old man drank, flicked the cup into the fireplace, and looked at me very steadily. And the blood looked out from the back of his cunning eyes, crying aloud to be understood.

"That's the line, is it? Has she put you up to this?"

"She will be the most surprised girl in the world when she hears I've met you. No, I'm seeing you because I have appointed myself her guardian."

"Is that so? Because her father is just an old bum, eh? Fine, fine!"

"I have only been her guardian since last night, Mr. Fox. I found she was spending last night at Mrs. Hepburn's apartment——"

"Who's she? An Englishwoman, eh?"

"Marilyn told me, sir, that you had kicked her out for good and all. That was how I became her guardian."

"Now isn't that too bad?"

"So it is as her guardian, Mr. Fox, that I have now come to ask you why the dickens I should do your duty for you? It's not giving me a fair deal, sir, to sneak out of your responsibilities like this."

"Say, this is fine! I certainly like you a lot, boy."

"There is something more I want to ask you, Mr. Fox."

"Don't let anything in the world stop you making me laugh."

"Why don't you take Marilyn away for a year or two? Abroad, anywhere, round the world. Just to give her a rest from New York."

"Yeah," he said thoughtfully, chewing at an unlit cigar. After a good chew he carefully laid the beastly thing down on a small table on which I had been careless enough to put my gloves.

"Now, young man, I'll say something, if I may."

"Please."

I could not take my eyes off the chewed cigar on the table, near my gloves. It rolled a bit. Well, one shouldn't carry gloves in America.

"Know Charlie MacRae?"

"A friend of mine, Mr. Fox."

"Is that so? Know anything about him?"

"Mr. Fox, if I were to go around trying to know 'anything' about my friends, I

should end up with precious few." I glanced at his books of poetry. Well, they were his best friends. But he said nothing I went on : " I've heard he is a big operator on the market and that he runs a chain of laundries. Well, we all have our hobbies."

" We certainly do ! And yours, young man, is talking bunk. But I'm not saying anything about Charlie's graft if you don't know what it is. But listen to me, son. A man has a perfect right to associate with any man he takes a fancy to—that's right, isn't it ? But it's not the same thing when it comes to a girl like Marilyn—now, is it ? "

" I agree."

" Now isn't that too bad ! And I thought we might have an argument. ' I agree,' says my trig young friend. Well, that's fine ! But if you ' agree,' why in hell do you want to come here talking into your hat ? "

" Every girl has a right to an infatuation, Mr. Fox."

" Sure, Mister Count—and every father

has a right to tell his daughter where she gets off. Listen, son. Let me tell you something. What you want to do is to keep clear of racketeers like Charlie MacRae. Don't go mixing yourself up in all that, young man. I like you, so I'm telling you."

"Mr. Fox, will you take Marilyn back if I persuade her to come? She will be angry with me when she knows I have asked you this. But will you?"

He had one of those confounded paper cups in his hand, but he forgot to drink. He forgot to laugh, too.

"Sure I will," he said heavily. "Why not? I didn't drive her out, son. She said she was seeing MacRae in New York, so I told her to get the hell out of here, and she went. But go ahead and do your stuff, boy. Let Marilyn come home—if she can get MacRae out of her mind."

The poor old scoundrel! For all his bluff and noise he was nothing but a lonely old man, and he knew it. And what is

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poetry but wind, and can a man live on wind? No, he could not drive Marilyn out of his heart, it was easy to see. Marilyn was his darling, and he yearned after her. But every time he thought of his darling, the sinister figure of MacRae clouded his vision. The thing to do for the old man was, obviously, to put the fear of MacRae out of his mind.

"Will you believe me, Mr. Fox, when I tell you that there is not one chance in ten million of Marilyn marrying Charlie MacRae?"

Old Pete Fox looked at me very steadily, breathing hard. He still had one of those confounded paper cups in his great hand.

"Do you tell me that, young man?"

"Yes."

The old man rose to his great height, staring down at me. What a handsome old fellow he was! Then he emptied his paper cup at a gulp. Then he nodded thoughtfully and picked up the cigar from the table and again began chewing at it.

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"That's fine," he said.

"It's true," I said.

"How do you know, son?"

"I know," I said.

"That's fine," he said.

Suddenly I felt very embarrassed. I got up to go.

"And tell Marilyn," he said, "that this is always her home. No, don't tell her anything. A girl has got to find her own way out. Listen, son—how's this for an idea? Why don't you marry her and put my mind at rest for good and all?"

He enjoyed that joke immensely. We laughed with one another like friends of long standing.

"Not me!" I said.

"I'll do it yet!" cried Pete Fox, roaring with laughter.

"Marilyn," I said, "is like a good many girls I have met over here—independent, can think for herself——"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Well, she will make her second husband

supremely happy, Mr. Fox. The first, poor devil, will go the way of a large number of America's male population—be sacrificed for Marilyn's education."

"You're crazy! She's had a swell education. In Paris, too."

"All that American girls learn at schools in Paris is to prefer America."

The old man saw me to the front door, his great arm around my shoulder.

"Never forget to come to me if you want anything, son. I'm your friend, remember that."

He saw me to my hired car. The cunning blue eyes searched me keenly. What a muddled, bewildered brain there was behind them!

"And you tell me, honest to God," said Pete Fox, "that there's nothing to this MacRae business?"

"Honest to God," I said.

"That's fine," he said.

The old scoundrel's eagerness to believe me was more than I could stand.

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"Let me tell you a secret," I said.
"MacRae will marry Mrs. Hepburn."

Staring at me hard, he took a deep breath.

"Well, that's fine," he said.

He pressed my hand, and I felt very pleasantly that, had he been trying to be a good fellow with me, he would have wrung it.

"Will you promise me something, son? I'll feel a lot easier if you will. Will you promise me that if ever anything happens and MacRae looks like marrying my girl—you will let me know? Now can you promise me that? This means a whole lot to me. I like you for being so above-board with me, son, and I'd certainly like to have that promise."

"I can easily promise you that, sir, because I can't think it can ever happen."

"You never know. Do you give me your word?"

"I do, certainly."

"Well, son, you may be a Count and you

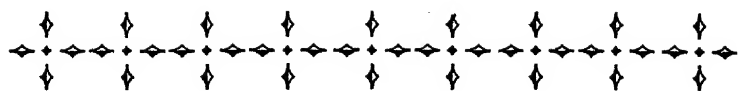
may be no account, but you've certainly been pretty darn nice to an old man, and I'll never forget it. Come and see me again before you leave America—now will you promise me that, too? ”

“ I will, Pete.”

“ Good boy ! Well, it's been fine to know you, fine ! Good-bye, son. Take care of my girl.”

And as I drove back to New York I realised that there was one strange and significant fact about my conversation with the old humbug, and that was that he was not a humbug about his absorption in the classical poets. For he had not said one word about poetry. He had asked me to have a drink, but he had not asked me if I read poetry, for that mattered to him more than drink.

What did poetry give that earthy old man ? Truth ? Beauty ? Solace ? Or vengeance against the world for the sins of the body that the world imposes on men ?



• XII •

BACK in New York, I stopped at the Savoy Plaza, where I was now staying, to change. It was pleasant to take my time. It was pleasant to reflect on how my life in New York had altered since I had left dear Isabella's roof. I should be sorry to leave New York now. Why was this? One reason was that I could now pick my friends and my engagements, and another was that I had at last found something to do.

But let there be no misunderstanding. This "something to do" was nothing less than downright officious interference in other people's affairs. My impertinence was unbelievable. Nor was I impelled to it by lofty motives, but by a passion for tidiness. Isabella was half right—I was a tramp only amongst orderly people, but amongst the

unconventional I at once became orderly. Well, so things go.

What I had done was to take Charlie MacRae, Sheila and Marilyn under my wing. Old Pete Fox had now also, though in a lesser degree, come into the charmed circle. This was my flock, my burden, my charge, my responsibility. And what a handful! I wanted, before leaving New York, to have their affairs arranged nice and ship-shape. To tidy them up was the idea. To leave them happier than I had found them. That was all I wanted to do. They did not know this, but I knew it, and the knowledge filled me with both fear and pleasure.

Let me give the facts as they presented themselves to my clouded intelligence. It seemed highly probable that MacRae and Sheila would marry. That was all right. The problem of Marilyn then asserted itself. It asserted itself strongly. She was romantically infatuated with MacRae, but now she appeared to accept his pairing-off with

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Sheila as inevitable and proper. That was all right. She was only a child, after all. But what, once they were married, would she do? Would she quietly go home to that pleasant old scoundrel of a father, or would she insist on living in New York? That was the problem. One thing was certain—Marilyn let loose in New York would deteriorate. I did not want her to deteriorate. She was too nice, too honest, altogether too fine a young woman—that is to say, she was too pretty and attractive—to be allowed to deteriorate. But she certainly had leanings that way. The call to deteriorate was in her blood. The call of the tiresome wild party. And I had promised old Pete Fox to take care of her. That was rash. And Pete Fox, no doubt, expected me to come up to scratch. He had in me the blind faith that a man of affairs has in an idler when it comes to questions of procedure. Such faith is stimulating, even when very ill-founded.

The case of Charlie MacRae and Sheila

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Hepburn appeared, at a first glance, to present no openings for beneficial interference. They were old enough to know what they wanted. They were old enough to adjust themselves to what they wanted. They were old enough to be in no doubt as to whether they wanted each other or not.

And they did want each other.

Life, after having given each many spurious gifts, had presented the one to the other as the real thing. They knew this. They were both simple enough and nice enough to believe that there was a "real thing." They loved—at last, sighed Sheila. Then why could they not get themselves married and settled?

Alas, why not? It was not in Sheila's nature to make difficulties where her emotions were even superficially engaged. And now she was convinced that they were deeply and finally engaged. At first I had thought she might hesitate before marrying a man who, in spite of a shy and gentle

charm of manner with women, was said to have made his fortune by unusual methods—in short, a “laundry” keeper. But I had misjudged Sheila. Not only did Charlie MacRae’s past life not matter to her at all, but also she had the well-bred English-woman’s admiration for money and distaste for knowing anything about its sources.

It was in MacRae that the difficulties arose—in the idealism of MacRae. Let us ponder on this. But I don’t think pondering will help us. Sheila’s gold-and-white loveliness and gentle manners had tied MacRae’s soul into knots of self-contempt. He would not aspire to her. He could not bring himself to think of her as united to him. He felt indescribably mean for permitting himself to love her. His notoriety, now that he loved her, was as gall and bitterness to him. He exalted her far above the low species to which he—with such pronounced success—belonged.

The crook who is kind to his wife and kiddies at home is an old story. But I

found Charlie MacRae's not so old. It seemed to me fantastic that a man like MacRae, who had lived *centrally* in that particular abyss of civilization to which he had been called, should after so many years be so inexperienced in his relations with a woman like Sheila Hepburn. The clown who wants to play Hamlet is an old story, and the crook who is pure at heart is an old story. That is all very well, but how the dickens could a man like MacRae be so inexperienced? How did he get that way? It was superb of him. How could he, whom women had loved, women who were no better than they should be, have kept his innocence, his hopes, his illusions, so fresh? How could he not know, not feel, that dear weak Sheila had led a sloppy silly life seeking happiness in trifling love-affairs?

But he did not know. Well, Napoleon did not know about Josephine, either. For MacRae, Sheila was an unhappy far-off woman, a woman once unhappily married,

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a woman lonely and gracious and desperately unquiet in a world wherein a generous and tender heart was at a disadvantage. He was convinced that what she deserved and what she longed for, after her years of lonely unhappiness, were understanding and respect and love. He laid these at her feet. And then he felt that he ought to slink away.

Whereas I, who knew Sheila, knew that he would be making a very great mistake to slink away. And I felt it was my business, as an old and devoted friend of Sheila's, to see that he did not slink away.

It was for such reasons that MacRae interested me so profoundly. I wished him well in return for his superb innocence. He was a figure of fantasy, but what deep and opposite roots his fantasy had—in lawlessness towards men and innocence towards women.

Now I suspect the word "glamour," and at the same time it fascinates me. Glamour is a subtle and an innocent thing, not to be

captured, for instance, by Famous Players-Lasky or Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The innocence of Charlie MacRae impressed me as the triumph of glamour over experience. There should be more of that triumph in this world. Can we have enough men who are innocent enough to let themselves be englamoured? I do not mean that MacRae was innocent because he had had very little to do with women. He had known many light women, but he retained his innocence with them and his tenderness towards them because of a deep respect for womanhood which experience could not soil. This man, no matter what hurt he might cause a woman, was innocent of evil, because what he did was done instinctively, what he felt came from his blood and not from his mind, his attitude towards women was an out-pouring of instinctive respect for a species higher than himself.

Therefore, I wished Charlie MacRae well. It would be a good thing to help him win Sheila, in whom his ideals had found an

idol. Let him have his pretty idol. Once married to her, lovely Sheila was too stupid to be anything but the idol he had married. Only a clever woman could disillusion a man like Charlie MacRae. Only an articulate woman, a woman who wants her rights, a proud woman who wants to be an equal instead of a superior, can divest herself of the glamour that an innocent man's mind has put upon her.

Sheila had no doubts at all about their happiness once they were married. Her marriage with that particular man was the house of her dreams. Her previous life, the succession of her love affairs in Paris, had grown dim and unreal. She was quite positive that the woman who loved and was loved by Charlie MacRae was a quite different woman from the Sheila Hepburn who had been known in Paris as "easy."

But she feared punishment. Sheila was superstitious, and she feared retribution. Her sins would find her out. She believed desperately that she was not the sort of

woman who could ever get away with anything. The superstition of punishment transfixed her like a sword. She made a drama for herself, and lived in it with a pounding heart.

In the dramas that light women make for themselves they are invariably figures of deep tragedy, misunderstood and fated. Light women walk on dragging feet to their destiny. They forget they have had fun in the past, they are figures of tragedy. It is not that they repent of their sins, although they say they do. They think of their sins as a black inheritance from a previous life, and they think of this inheritance as a burden they are compelled to carry through life. They have an immense consciousness of sin and are angry at any irreligious flippancy about it. For this reason they are so profoundly moved by such stupidly unreal tragedies as the story of *la Dame aux Camélias*. Light women, who have been the joy of men, cannot resist seeing themselves as the victims of their ghosts.

Sheila's love for Charlie MacRae, which she knew was final, gave her conscience no peace. She was thirty-five years old. MacRae was the final anchorage of her frailty. And she lived in an agony of fear lest he should find out something about her life in Paris—that dead far-away life that was crowded with phantoms that her conscience called up. What would she do if he found out, what could she say?

At this time I never saw Sheila alone but she did not plead with me to say her fears were groundless, implore me never to drop a hint of her past life to Charlie, beg me to tell her what chances there were of Charlie ever discovering the truth. It was impossible to reason with her. She worshipped in MacRae his innocence and his idealism. These things were so strange and beautiful in MacRae's harsh character. She loved his idealism, but knew that it might also be her judge. What would she do if he found out, what would she do? And what would Charlie do?

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She shrank from thinking of the possible effect on him of finding out what she had been, that she, whom he respected with that fine clean part of him which he had always kept intact as though to place at her feet, was only a light woman.

"André, why did you never tell me in Paris that one day I should meet a man I worshipped? André, you know I am stupid, why didn't you warn me? Oh God, what a fool I have been!"

And through all this sentimental uneasiness Marilyn walked quietly in a very disengaged sort of way. She was a little too quiet, I fancied. Grey eyes, what are you thinking of? Was she jealous? Was she bitter? Was she biding her time? Was she resigned? Well, I fancied she was. She saw a great deal of Sheila. Dear Sheila was quite certain that Marilyn liked her. Sheila liked Marilyn very much. She thought Marilyn was so nice and straightforward. Marilyn, poor girl, certainly made a great effort to like Sheila. It seemed to

her, I think, that she simply *had* to like Sheila or go crazy with jealousy and anger. Marilyn felt, probably, that for her *not* to like Sheila would be to confess that she, Marilyn, was mean and childish. It wasn't the accusation of being mean that she minded, and anyhow she felt mean. But she objected very strongly to giving the impression, particularly to Charlie, of being childish.

All the same, in spite of every good intention, Marilyn did not like Sheila. Sheila was not her sort. Sheila was too slow and stupid and sloppy for Marilyn. She suspected Sheila of insincerity. Besides, Marilyn did not like Englishwomen anyway. That was the real trouble. One met quite a number of American girls who did not like Englishwomen much. They were suspicious of Englishwomen. They were irritated by Englishwomen's manners and they suspected Englishwomen of insincerity. And the beauty of Englishwomen was to them a blank and boring beauty. Englishwomen were la-de-da, they said, and on the make,

too. If you want to see a gold-digger, they said, watch an Englishwoman of good family in America. And deep down they suspected Englishwomen of something . . . I never found out exactly what . . . they suspected Englishwomen of something . . . of something almost like bodily but fundamental unsatisfactoriness.

Well, one supposes that every new civilization must have its little joke. These straight-limbed young American girls with legs up to their shoulder-blades did not get from Englishwomen the impression they got from each other, that they were scrubbed clean. These American girls treated their slender bodies with the utmost firmness and rigour, and it seemed to them unnatural and distasteful that any woman should merely lie in a bath. They suspected Englishwomen of lying in their baths. They suspected all Europeans, in varying degrees, of treating water with too much respect. Whereas they, these proud and slender and pathetic and rather humourless creatures of a new

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civilization, treated water in a very cavalier way, as we all treat the divine gift of air. Water, very hot and very cold, must be everywhere, day or night, in baths, shower-baths and swimming pools. And they whipped their bodies with water as though it was not something of importance, not one of the four great elements. They had enslaved water, and they gave it no peace. Water is the handmaiden of American civilization. And gin is the kitchenmaid. But the handmaiden is a swell dresser, and while one can look at her who will bother about the mess the slatternly kitchenmaid is making among the pots and pans?



• XIII •

IT was nearly midnight when I reached MacRae's apartment. He was giving one of his parties, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that some of his acquaintances had decided to meet together at his apartment and, at all costs and despite every reason to the contrary, stay up till all hours.

MacRae was a splendid host. That is to say, he had none of the qualities of a host except generosity. He liked to have young people around, so long as they did not bother him. Anyone could bring his or her friends to MacRae's apartment or to his house at Great Neck, so long as it was clearly understood that MacRae was not to be bothered with them.

The arrangement appeared to work very well. MacRae had hit on the only way in which parties, if they have to be given at all,

should be given—that is to say, if the host is to have any fun.

MacRae had a penthouse on Park Avenue. Penthouse, in this sense, like duplex and commuter and other words, is a product of the same American infantilism that has produced such various benefits and menaces as Prohibition, Mrs. Aimé Semple Macpherson, gangsters, tabloid-newspapers, Tammany Hall, Senator Smoot, chewing-gum, Miss Peggy Hopkins Joyce, Nicaragua, and the Book-of-the-Month Club. Whereas European senility puts forth its own lovely blooms for all the world to admire, Bolshevism and Fascismo and Security and bloody murder in the name of human progress.

When I say MacRae had a penthouse on Park Avenue, I mean he had the two top floors of an apartment-house on Park Avenue and that he paid, in a city of enormous rents, as high a rent as it was possible to pay. In return for this he had a garden and a view over New York. The view immediately below was not so good, as the

next block was taken up with the building or pulling-down of a large apartment-house.

MacRae's was a show place, and had been decorated by a famous firm of interior decorators. It will be recalled that he had a charming Louis Quinze salon at Great Neck. Well, this apartment was also charming. Since MacRae himself had no taste, he had, of course, been talked into it. Something will have to be done about the intensive bullying practised by interior-decorators and their panders. Gradually they are making every spacious house uninhabitable. In parts of New York and among the foreign colony in Paris this period snob-bisme has reached such a point that people who enjoy lunching at their friends' houses must go there on crutches if they wish to avoid touring the place to be "crazy about" the cinquecento tassel on the flush in the privy. But not even the famous interior-decorator, and famous interior-decorators are famous for their lack of sensibility to

human interiors, had had the courage to pilot MacRae round his apartment and show him the boiserie. Had the decorator done so, one could imagine one-armed MacRae looking at him with his twisted grin and saying in his low soft voice : " Yeah. How much did you say ? Yeah, that's fine. Louis Quinze, did you say ? Louis who ? Is that so ? Sure, I like it. Well, glad you had a good time. Good-bye. But just take all that Louis Whosit stuff out of my study, will you ? I'm going to *live* in that darn room." Well, MacRae had his snobbery, too. It was the fairly common one of not wishing to pretend he enjoyed what he had not been brought up to enjoy. MacRae lived in his enormous apartment as in a hotel, and as in a hotel most of the rooms were full of strangers. But a hotel would have been quieter.

The door was opened to me by Norris, one of the establishment's three huge men-servants. Norris had one of those bull-dog faces so frequently seen on Irishmen in

America and so seldom in England. So there is still some hope for England. The other two men, O'Neill and Hangar, equally unattractive, were usually nearby. They were the worst and most ill-mannered servants in the world. Their rudeness was of the kind that is called "amusing" by people who are called "amusing" by their friends.

I never understood in exactly what relation to MacRae they stood, whether they were servants, secretaries, colleagues, laundrymen, or friends. O'Neill was usually dressed in loose-fitting black clothes, so maybe he thought he was being a butler. Norris and Hangar seemed, behind rugged exteriors, to be living lives of terrific but detached exasperation. They seemed to take a pride in being rude, and succeeded in being as rude as only Americans can be, which is about half as rude as a Frenchman.

I had been told that Norris, O'Neill and Hangar were ex-policemen who had been fired from the force on graft charges and

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engaged by MacRae to act in various capacities. I never gathered what the various capacities were, nor why ex-police-men should be engaged to fill them. Later I heard they had been discharged for working on MacRae's behalf, so it was natural he should employ them. It was hardly natural to inflict them on his friends, but MacRae was very casual about such details, and besides, had he any friends?

"Norris, where is Mr. MacRae?"

From the big rooms came the usual hullabaloo of music and voices.

"Charlie?" said Norris. "Working, I guess."

"Many people here?"

"Sure. Usual bunch of high-hats talking boloney."

"What?"

"What I said," said the democratic and agreeable Norris. O'Neill and Hangar chuckled.

What bores they were with their affectation of rudeness! Is there anything more in-

furiating than the pose of being gruff and blunt and disagreeable?

"You big bum!" I said. "Or stiff. Whichever is correct in your idiotic language. In mine we say *crétin*."

"What!" gasped Norris.

"What I said," I said, walking away.

I had come only to see MacRae and had no desire to join in the merriment. Sheila would not be here, as she had a cold, and I fancied that Marilyn—always trying to do the right thing by Sheila—would be with her. The young newspaper men, with a sprinkling of stage people, who made up the crowd that came to MacRae's apartment, had taken a great liking to Sheila. They thought her dumb, but lovely and very nice.

They were for the most part what is called an intellectual crowd. They had no God, and Ernest Hemingway was their prophet, and not such a bad prophet, either. But they drank too much. This gave them a look of attractive melancholy, and women

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loved them. They were all going to write great novels or great plays very soon, and sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't, but went to write dialogue in Hollywood. It was only in the meanwhile they were doing newspaper work. Every now and then one of them would come out with the "play of the century" full of tough realism or "magic whimsy" and all their friends wrote columns about them in the newspapers. They seemed to get a lot of fun out of knowing each other extremely well, and that is always something. The climate of their self-criticism, which was cold, conflicted queerly with the tropical ardours of the log-rolling they did each for the other. One of the most significant factors in American life, usually overlooked by foreign observers, is that Americans really do like Americans. This, however, still leaves the people who like Americans in a minority. Which is tough.

It was not easy to discover exactly how these young people thought of MacRae.

They seemed to take him for granted as a very rich man who had his own business to attend to but enjoyed having people around. They knew nothing about him, except that he was generous and did not need de-bunking. And I think they liked him because he had frequently helped pretty women in their careers without trying to make love to them.

Under O'Neill's and Hangar's watchful eyes I went along to MacRae's study door, knocked and went in. He was sitting at a writing-table with many papers before him. He looked as though he needed a long sleep.

"Will you tell me, MacRae, why you are forever cramming your home with people you care so little about that you take care never to see them?"

His keen eyes looked tired, and his lean leathery face was all sharp angles.

"They are a good bunch of boys, Andy. I can afford to see they enjoy themselves. Life's short, isn't it? Well, let 'em have a good time."

"Am I disturbing you?"

"I'm only clearing up." He grinned. It was easy to see why Sheila and Marilyn loved the fellow. The lean lined face, harsh and leathery and handsome, the keen disquieting eyes, his whole harsh aspect, could be changed by a grin to that of a deprecatory schoolboy.

"Clearing up," he said. "It's a whale of a job, Andy."

He looked at me as though expecting me to ask a question. He was an extraordinary fellow. How did that hardboiled face manage to look so . . . shy?

"Sounds to me," I said, "like a happy ending."

"Laugh away!" he said.

"I'm not laughing," I said, "much."

"Okay with me if you bust laughing. What a sap I am, Andy! To be acting like a silly kid at my age—and liking it. Hating it too, I guess. Being in love makes me feel sick, Andy. Do you see how it is? I've just got to get right with myself before I ask her.

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Well, we're all as we are made, aren't we?"

"Don't worry so much about yourself," I said.

"You bet your life I won't once I've got everything straight. But I think I've the hell of a cheek, don't you, Andy?"

"What about?"

"You know damn well what about. Say, listen. What's a nice decent woman going to think of a man like me going to her and asking her to marry him? There's a big laugh coming to her, that's what."

"She won't laugh, MacRae."

"You're right she won't laugh, because she's an angel. Andy, I feel like nothing at all about this business. I'm talking straight now, Andy. If Sheila was my sister I'd see a man like me in hell before——"

"As Sheila isn't your sister, my advice to you is to go ahead."

"Frenchman, you've no respect for woman. Know what I'd like to do?"

"Marry Sheila and settle down in a nice little cottage somewhere."

"Boy, what a snappy little cottage I could get ! I'm worth ten to fifteen million, Andy—that is, if I can get away with it."

"Why shouldn't you, if it's yours ? "

"I guess you don't understand business, Andy. Jealousy is what gets people sore. You'd be surprised, Andy. A lot of people in this world just don't know when they're well off. But to hell with all that. I think of Sheila and me together in some quiet place in Europe—I'd buy a property somewhere, see ? "

"Yes, I see," I said. "Go ahead and do it, MacRae."

"What's Europe like, Andy ? "

"I didn't realise you had never been."

"I've been too busy, I guess. How do you think I'll get on in Europe, Andy ? "

"You'll like it, I fancy."

"Boy ! Going old places and seeing old things, eh ? It sounds good to me. I've always wanted to do that, Andy. Sure, I'll like it. But will they like me ? I wouldn't want to let Sheila down, Andy."

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"Some of the best-liked Americans in Europe, MacRae, are the ones who are known as crooks in America."

"Is that so? Then they'll fall all over me, will they? Isn't that fine! You'll be my friend, won't you, Andy? You're a big shot over there, I suppose. You'll give me a hand, Andy? Sure, you will. Let me tell you something, Andy. You're a darn nice guy for a Frenchman. You should see some of the ones I've met. 'Oh, Mr. MacRae, I hear you are interested in the proposed merger between the What's-This Corporation and Multiple Electric. My wife admires you so much, Mr. MacRae. Do you think that merger will go through?' Christ, if Sheila won't marry me!"

"Do you know, MacRae, I believe she has forgotten herself so far as to love you."

"Life's a marvel, isn't it, Andy? Gosh, it's wonderful! Me falling for Sheila—a lady, darn it! But you're wrong about her loving me, Andy. Say, listen—she's had an unhappy lonely life, and what she gets

from me is sympathy and understanding, see. Gosh, I'll be a happy man if she will let me take care of her. A whole lot happier than I deserve . . . ”

He sat drumming thoughtfully on the table with the fingers of his one hand. Then he gave a contemptuous flick at the mass of papers in front of him.

“It's about time to quit, anyway. I've been getting darn tired lately.”

“I promise you a grand time in Europe, MacRae.”

“You're a good boy, Andy. But I've got a lot to do first.” And suddenly he grinned. And somehow his nature stood revealed. He enjoyed looking forward to trouble and excitement. He enjoyed the stress and danger of fighting against his fellows. He enjoyed wringing triumphs out of difficulties. He loved fighting, and fighting to win. He might have made a great politician—in any country except America, where a bootlegger's reputation stands higher.

"It's not going to be so easy, Andy. No, sir. There are complications, do you see?"

"Are laundries so difficult to wind up?"

He grinned broadly.

"I've got a lot of outstanding contracts, Andy. And it wouldn't be fair to Sheila if something happened to me the day before we started for Europe—now, would it? I'd feel kind of mean for letting her in for a thing like that."

"But what could happen?"

"Better ask O'Neill, Andy. He's so full of suspicions he's liable to explode any moment. The trouble with him is he can't get Rothstein out of his head. O'Neill's rather like you, Andy. He doesn't understand the difference between a plain business man like me and a gambler like A. R."

"Was Rothstein a friend of yours, MacRea?"

"I'm telling you, Andy, he was a gambler and I've never been anything but a plain business man. And I never had but one friend in that bunch, and that was Fallon,

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the lawyer. Fallon was a great guy, Andy. Never let a friend down in his life. Gosh, I liked him a lot. He was a grand boy, was Fallon."

"Why do you worry so much about having a lot of money? One doesn't need a lot, Charlie."

"I guess millions give me a big thrill, Andy. And listen to this. If Sheila sacrifices herself for a guy like me she is going to have the best of everything in the world. Am I right, or am I right? I darn well know I'm right. Now you go along and amuse yourself, Andy. I've got these papers to clear up. Marilyn is somewhere around."

"I thought she was with Sheila."

"What will you bet she's not come here looking for you? I've got a hunch about you and Marilyn, Andy."

"What nonsense, MacRae!"

"Now isn't that too bad! Here, take my handkerchief and wipe that red off your cheeks. It doesn't suit you."

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"I went down to see old Pete Fox to-day to persuade him to take Marilyn back home."

"Good boy! Meet the Count, most unselfish man in the world. Doesn't fancy the girl, but wants to know her pa. And how did you like old Pete?"

"I didn't expect to, but I did."

"Sure, he's okay. There's a lot to old Pete, Andy. He's a great old fellow."

"The admiration is far from mutual, MacRae."

"Yeah, Pete and I have been on the outs a long time now."

We were by the door. MacRae laid his one hand on my shoulder, looking at me intently.

"Frenchman, I'll tell you something about Pete Fox which I've never told anyone. And I'm telling you because I don't want to have you think too badly about Marilyn's father. Yeah, I know all that. Pete is known as a kinda small Boss Tweed, isn't he—man who made millions out of

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graft. Now listen. Pete began his administration as Mayor like an honest man. He wanted to show the world that Tammany wasn't entirely run by a bunch of dirty crooks. Say, listen. Andy, the old man—not that he was old then—took a pride in his honesty. He started fine. Then along comes a young fellow with one arm called MacRae, and he gets a pull over old Pete Fox, see. He makes old Pete laugh, and they have a swell time together—wise old Pete and this young MacRae, who was a business-man, see, and out for big money. Well, old Pete wasn't wise enough, I guess. Now life's funny, isn't it? This young MacRae gets so that he has it all his own way with Pete Fox, and before Pete sees what's happening he's at the head of as corrupt a city administration as even New York ever had. And this young MacRae cleans up, see. And Pete Fox cleans up, but he's not the same man. His heart's not in the graft, see. He's let himself be made a grafter, and he doesn't like it. And he

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can't go back on his friends, but he doesn't run for Mayor again. He hates MacRae's guts, see, for making a sucker out of him. Pete was proud of being a poor man, and now he's rich, and he hates the guy that made him rich, because Pete Fox wasn't born to be a crook, see. Say, listen. I'm older now than I was then, Andy, and I feel kind of mean when I think about Marilyn's father. Until he dies Pete will have it in for me for making him rich when all he wanted was to be known as Honest Pete. I've made a sucker out of him, see. Well, that's life, I guess. A guy's got to know his way around—and old Pete thought he did, but he didn't. But don't you ever forget, Andy, when Pete Fox is blowing his mouth off about me, that he's right and I'm wrong. Now get the hell out of here and let me finish my work."

He opened the door to push me out, and I had my first glimpse of Norris, O'Neill and Hangar in action. The three bullies

were grouped around a small fat man. He was swearing and perspiring, and they stood smiling at him.

"You can't see him anyways," said O'Neill.

A voice behind me, quite unlike the voice of the MacRae I knew, snapped :

"What's the noise ? "

"Eddie Steiner here wants to see you, boss," said O'Neill grinning.

"Here, Charlie !" the little fat man whined. "Tell these dirty cops to lay off me. I gotta talk to you."

MacRae walked quickly to him. The three ex-policemen stood aside, grinning furtively. Mr. Steiner was left facing MacRae. I felt friendly towards him. Perhaps Mr. Steiner's grandfather was the same Steiner who had come over with my grandfather Schvengenstein. And now look at him. The scion of the Steiners looked desperately uncomfortable while the scion of the Schvengensteins, in the guise of a Frenchman of means, stood leering in the

offing. The influence of Jews in the modern world can be seen etcetera.

MacRae said : " If you want to see me, Steiner, you know the way to my office. I give you one minute to clear out. I'm waiting."

Mr. Steiner was profoundly dejected.

" Aw, Charlie, I simply gotta see you. You promised Angelli to let him have that confirmation from City Hall two days ago, and——"

" Well, Angelli can wait. My office is the place for business, Steiner. Don't ever forget it again."

MacRae, one arm swinging, strode back to his study and slammed the door.

" Boss is sore'n hell," said O'Neill.
" Better watch your step, Eddie."

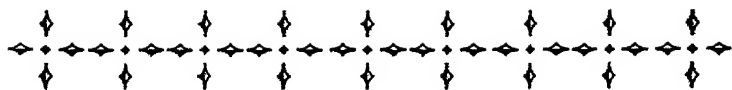
" And he'd better watch his ! " shouted Mr. Steiner. " You boys are nuts on Charlie MacRae, aren't you ? Well, let me tell *you* something——"

" Get the hell out of here, Eddie," said O'Neill, and as Mr. Steiner was hustled out

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of the apartment I stood reflecting on the childish vanity of MacRae which prompted him to talk to Mr. Steiner in the normal language of an educated man but to me in the language of the Bowery.

I joined the party.



• XIV •

IN the long salon, which gave out onto a wide terrace high above the lights of New York, four or five couples were dancing to some very faint music on the radio. I sat down to watch. Then someone switched off the radio, but they still went on dancing, and I was wondering how they could dance without music when I realised that a husky and insinuating wail was coming from the next room.

I was too lazy to get up and find the source of this depressing noise. It seemed to have a hypnotic effect on the dancers. Then the wail of the saxophone died and was picked up by a man's voice, and he wasn't singing but whispering, and he was whispering in a low and extraordinarily insinuating voice.

The dancers took this whispering very seriously. They danced slowly, they listened

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profoundly. Their eyes became glassy. In short, something unusual and wonderful was happening to them. Something was happening to me, too. My eyes grew heavy, and incoherent but illegitimate thoughts stirred within me. Could it be for the same reason that pure and respectable women like Isabella loved this whispering rhythm? Because it *did* something to them? The dancers' feet, lackadaisical but enchanted, lingered with the rhythm. The whisper of the man in the next room, ecstatically indifferent to the language of his forefathers, seemed to entwine them with a delight that was too intense for expression. In a word, O boy!

And in the whisper, in the very texture of this lilting thing, was a sort of sexual swagger. This made the men look preoccupied and the women tenuous, frail and very sleepy. Well might the man sing: "What is this thing called love?" What, indeed!

Marilyn was partnered by a good-looking, untidily dressed young man of ex-collegiate

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appearance. That sounds a pretty horrible thing to look like, but it does not look quite so horrible as it sounds. They passed by my chair.

“How are you, Marilyn?”

“I could die! Isn’t that voice too wonderful!”

“Who is it?”

“Joe Paradise. Good as Rudy Vallee, isn’t he?”

Her heart is breaking, I thought, but her feet are happy. I reflected on unhappiness. What a great subject! Enormous, limitless, eternal, and perhaps rather boring. After all, we can all be unhappy. It’s perhaps the only thing the fool can do as well as the genius. At the same time, though everyone is equally good at it, how proud people are of being able to be unhappy! But of course they like to dance too, and that’s where Joe Paradise comes in. Marilyn cries herself to sleep every night, I thought, but because Joe Paradise is singing one of his songs her feet are as happy as a bride’s on her honeymoon.

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Presently she came to me, and because Joe Paradise's five-million-dollar voice was making me sleepy I suggested we should sit on the terrace. There were deep chairs there, and a table with a heavy load of drinks. But Marilyn did not drink anything, and for some weeks past she had drunk nothing, for it was in the nature of this outrageous creature to flatter men by doing what she was told, except of course when she wanted to do something else.

We were both very quiet. Maybe we were both conscious of impending changes. "I stared down at the lights of New York, I stared up at the glittering tower of the New York Central Building, and I knew that I must presently be leaving America. And my life in Paris seemed to me remote, unreal, provincial. This thought made me smile. Marilyn, her head thrown back, daydreaming, glanced at me.

"Why are you smiling, André?"

"Because I was thinking I must soon be leaving New York. And I was thinking

it would be like leaving home. And I was thinking how curious it was for me to be thinking that."

"André, that's because you have gotten yourself bound up in our lives."

"I wonder how that's come about, Marilyn."

"Maybe it's because you are disinterested . . ."

Her fingers brushed the back of my hand. Grey eyes, what are you thinking of? So I was disinterested, was I? I could have told her a story or two to disprove that, but what was the use?

"Do you remember, André, our first meeting? André, d'you remember?"

"Never did pants, Marilyn, make a girl look so girlish."

"Wasn't it fun? André, isn't it fun to play at 'd'you remember'? How nice it would be if you and I had been married for twenty-six years, three months and two days and to be sitting here saying to each other: 'D'you remember that night on

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Long Island? D'you remember you were wearing pants? D'you remember Joseph and the big bright moon and my running away because you said I drank too much? André, then d'you remember how unhappy I was and how my heart felt as though it were bursting with tears and how the Englishwoman took my man away and how I took your breath away by asking you to marry me? And, André, d'you remember how I loved Charlie MacRae? ' Oh, how nice it would be to be old and to look back calmly on unhappy things ! ”

“ Those things don't really matter, Marilyn. Soon you will find something that matters.”

“ I don't believe a word you say, André, but tell me something more. Why do you approve of Sheila marrying Charlie and not of me ? ”

“ I was terrified you were going to ask me a difficult question.”

“ Make it snappy, André.”

“ Charlie MacRae is what he is—as you

know, Marilyn. But he idealises Sheila. To him Sheila is a star and an angel and a goddess of purity. And he is convinced, as profoundly as a man can be convinced of anything, that he has to be worthy of her——”

“He’s such a baby, André! Oh, he’s such a baby! I think I’ve known that always . . . when I was fourteen. André, it’s a shame to cheat a man like that.”

“Cheat? Who is cheating him, Marilyn?”

“No one, dear. I hadn’t anyone in mind, I was just talking. But wouldn’t it be a shame to cheat a man like Charlie, who is such a sap about women?”

“It might be for his good,” I said imprudently.

“And so,” she said, “you think it would be good for Charlie to marry Sheila. Whereas if he married me . . .”

“That’s where familiarity comes in, Marilyn. Charlie doesn’t idealise you.”

“And, you mean, familiarity breeds contempt?”

I did not say anything.

She gave a high unreal laugh.

"Oh, André, it takes a little familiarity to breed anything at all, doesn't it?"

The lovely desperate little face crimsoned as I stared at her. Then her fingers brushed my hand.

"Are you angry with me, André?"

"Is it anything to you if I am?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then why did you say that?"

"I just thought I'd like to put you right about me, André. It matters, somehow." The grey eyes fluttered. She would not look at me. Then she did look at me. I did not say anything. She said: "I thought you thought maybe I'd had lovers—and I haven't, see."

"Yes, I see," I said. Well, this was a nice mess. Here was I sitting with a girl on the roof of New York struggling against a longing to take her in my arms.

I left my chair and stood against the high parapet round the terrace and stared at the

lights of New York. Then Marilyn came beside me. I felt her bare arm against my sleeve.

"Go away," I said. Well, that was what I ought to have said, but I didn't.

"Oh, I don't want to think," she whispered. "Let's dance."

"No, let's think," I said. Dance, indeed ! Was the girl trying to destroy me ?

"Exactly my idea !" she sighed. "What shall you think about, André ?"

"You'd be surprised," I said.

Then she said :

"André, have I got to *ask* you to kiss me ?"

"I do wish," I said, "you'd leave me alone."

"Is that a nice thing to say, André ?"

"Why do you want me to kiss you, Marilyn ?"

"Because I want sympathy, dear."

"Well, you have all mine."

"But I like to touch my sympathy, dear."

"Kissing," I said, "is no joke."

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"That's true, too," she said. "Shall we be serious, then, and try not to flirt?"

"To hell with flirting!" I said.

"Mercy, what are Frenchmen coming to!"

"Being logical people, we know that flirting's stupid."

"Logical!"

"Certainly. Why else should we put 'Défense d'Uriner' on the walls of the Chamber of Deputies?"

"How delicately you change the subject!"

Oh, there is something unreal and farcical about what are called the natural processes of the mind, there is something much more unreal and farcical about profound impulses than about the surface idiocies that make us laugh. What is more unreal and unnatural than the process of falling in love? For the vast majority of men do not fall in love. They never fall in love. They think they do, but they don't. They force themselves to love. And to do this they create pictures in their minds, they set their

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imaginations to work. Yes, a man goes to an infinite amount of trouble to get himself in love. But because he has read books, or because through long tradition the word "love" has formed itself naturally in his mind, he does not realise that he is taking any trouble at all. But while he thinks that he has quite inevitably and naturally, just as he might have fallen down a flight of stairs, fallen in love with a certain woman and wants to marry her, he has in reality exercised all the ingenuity of his mind in making her attractive to him.

By thinking about her a man can make a woman infinitely more desirable to him than she can, no matter how she flatters him or adorns herself. It is said that any woman who takes trouble can get the man she wants, but the truth is that every man gets the woman he wants by the simple process of thinking her into being that woman. And he does this quite regardless of what she within herself is like.

The man who has met the woman of his

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dreams has never been born, but the man who dreams is born every second. A man's soul takes on the colour of the thoughts he permits himself when he is not at work, and the woman he is drawn to slips into the shape of his daydreams. And how surprised she sometimes is to find herself there, and what profound unhappiness there can be in the trivial plaint: "But why can't you love me as I am!"

A woman can never know how intensely and infinitely desirable a creature a man can make of her once his imagination has commanded: "Lo, you shall love this woman. And to do this you shall imagine her to be thus and thus, and you shall give her these qualities, and because her face is plain you shall know that she is the kindest of all women, and because she is stout and homely you shall know that beauty is mere dross and that the soul within is beauty, and because her face is fair and her eyes are deep and her body desirable you shall convince yourself that the soul within her

beautiful body is even more beautiful than her body."

It is imagination and not love that consumes men like fire. There is no such thing as "love at first sight." But there is in men the urge to make infinitely desirable what is immediately desirable, and so it comes to the same thing. We are all, men and women, at the mercy of a question which, whether we are wise or foolish, answers itself regardless of our convenience. The answer to this question is known as "love." This answer may come naturally to women, about whom we can know nothing. But to a man it comes about as naturally as climbing trees.

"What are you thinking, André?"

My arm was around her slim body. Alas, why must one touch! I took my arm away. We stared down at the lights of New York.

"The old story, Marilyn. I was just thinking that as soon as we begin to want some particular thing from life—we are

immediately shoved away from it. The world is free only if you are free from preferences, Marilyn."

"But *you* don't want anything, André. That's what is so remarkable about you."

"And who told you I didn't want anything?"

"Why, it's the easiest thing in the world to see!"

As I raised her face to mine her eyes widened with fear and astonishment. And suddenly she looked old and tired and unbearably beautiful. Then she trembled and her eyes closed and, collapsing astonishingly, her lips clung to mine. And her eyelashes were wet with tears.

"André, take care of me—André, you will take care of me, won't you?"

What had I done? My God what had I done!

"André, you shouldn't have kissed me—you shouldn't! Not if you don't mean it!"

"But I do, my darling!"

Suddenly she began laughing. Her eyes

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were wet with tears. She laughed for quite a while.

“ Oh, yes ? ” she said.

“ Marilyn, why are you laughing at me ? ”

“ Oh, how silly we are, André ! And we said we weren't going to flirt ! ”



• XV •

As I sat at breakfast the next morning, thinking that poor Marilyn had done all a girl could to pretend to herself that the reign of MacRae was over, Pierre came to see me on his way downtown.

I had seen very little of him since changing my quarters. Pierre regretted, I think, ever having invited me to come to the United States. The poor boy had invited me for one reason only, fancying I should be company for Isabella and go around with her among her fine friends. Anyhow, if I had done nothing else in New York I had driven Pierre out of the MacRae milieu. Thus I had paid homage to Isabella.

“Good morning, Pierre. How is Isabella?”

“All right. That is, wretched. She is disappointed about a baby again.”

Pierre's dark eyes looked at me sombrely. He was humiliated and exasperated. He fancied Isabella thought it was his fault. She was probably right, too.

"We have been to every sort of doctor, but nothing ever happens except a false alarm. It's bad for Isabella, nervous expectation like this. They say she *ought* to have a child. Nearly all her girl friends who came out with her have whole families. So she doesn't feel too good about it, and wakes up with a headache pretty nearly every morning."

"It's bad luck," I said.

"You're lucky to be single," he said.

"You're lucky to have a wife like Isabella."

He gave an exasperated laugh.

"Her father and mother think it's my fault, because I'm French."

"They may be right there," I said.

"Who knows?" Pierre said. And I saw he was beginning actively to dislike Isabella because she would not prove his virility by conceiving a child.

"Don't be too impatient, Pierre. Remember you are half a Jew, even if your father-in-law doesn't like to think of that, and Jews don't lack children. It will come out all right, Pierre. Persuade Isabella to be patient. You are both still very young."

"André, I want you to do something for me. I hear you are very friendly with MacRae."

"Aren't you?" I said.

"Well, I don't think so," Pierre said.

"Shall I tell you why, Pierre?"

"It's not necessary, my dear."

"He doesn't like you," I said, "for the same reason that a good many Americans look sideways at you—because you happen to have an unusually fine wife and an unusually silly way of showing you appreciate your luck."

"André, you are a comedian. Now I shall tell you what I have come to see you about. It's something I want you to ask MacRae. You know Maurice de Byrrh?"

"Is that young scoundrel here?"

"No, in Paris."

"That's something, at least."

"Look here, my dear, Maurice is in a hole and I'd like to do all I can to help him. I'll explain quickly. You may or may not know that for some years past some Englishmen and Frenchmen have been putting their money into sending liquor over here. A foolish thing to do, of course, but when it comes off the profits are enormous."

"Pierre, what has all this to do with you?"

"Nothing in the world—except that Maurice de Byrrh is an old friend of mine who is just about to marry a sweet young girl and has lost every penny he has. The young idiot was persuaded to put all his money into the last consignment to Nassau or somewhere, where the stuff is taken off and landed at Key West or Key East or what have you. I don't know a thing about that. All I do know is that poor Maurice had about two hundred thousand dollars in the world; wanted to treble it as he was

getting married, and now the whole lot has gone down the drain."

"I can't count in dollars. What does it make in francs?"

"About five million francs. It's no joke."

"And I suppose the Prohibition agents collared the liquor. What do you want me to say, Pierre? Would you like me to gnash my teeth because worthless young Europeans like Maurice de Byrrh and that English fellow Armitage, who was arrested the other day, burn their fingers trying to sneak fortunes by breaking the laws of another country? Look here, Pierre, do you know it is very amusing now and then to take a moral attitude about something? You mustn't do it all the time, of course, because then it gets tiresome. But why don't you try it once, just for a change? Now take this business. Here's Prohibition one side, here are we on the other, and here are some moral attitudes in the sugar bowl. Moral attitude one: if Americans enjoy breaking their own silly

laws, that's their business. Moral attitude two : Englishmen like Armitage and Frenchmen like Maurice de Byrrh are no more than dirty little sneaks looking for soiled dollar bills in the gutters of another country. Conclusion : we are delighted that Prohibition agents have stopped their little game this time."

"Exactly, my dear, but they haven't. Charlie MacRae got there before them."

"Are you crazy, Pierre ?"

"But surely you know who MacRae is. He is in control of the biggest ring of bootleggers in the country—at least, so far as anyone knows anything about the fellow. All I know about him is that he is a big operator on the market. Anyhow he is a big shot, as they call it in their comic language. I wouldn't have known a thing about this, or even connected MacRae in any definite way with bootlegging, if Maurice de Byrrh hadn't written to me from Paris."

"Good heavens, has MacRae's reputation reached Paris !"

MEN DISLIKE WOMEN

“Comedy, isn’t it? It seems the captain of the boat wrote to Maurice saying he could not do a thing. As they were unloading the stuff into fast motorboats, another party comes along in faster ones and loots the lot for a mere matter of two men killed. And the captain reported to Maurice that, as the looters came along, one of his men cried out: ‘MacRae’s hi-jackers’!”

“But what on earth does that prove, Pierre, except that MacRae is quite a common name? Of all the silly fairy-tales! Why, it might have been one of a thousand MacRaes. I’ve never heard such grotesque nonsense.”

“But it’s heavy nonsense, my dear—heavy as five million francs for poor Maurice de Byrrh. I thought you might manage to ask MacRae if these hi-jackers were his men or not. It’s unlikely, of course, but there’s just a chance. And MacRae has a name for being very kind and generous to his friends.”

It seemed an idiotically delicate question

to ask a man whom one dined with almost every night. "Did you or did you not rob a boat of so many thousand gallons of alcohol?" A friendly question. On the other hand, if everything went well and MacRae and Sheila settled in Paris, it would be unpleasant for them to have Maurice de Byrrh yelping for MacRae's blood. De Byrrh was quite a figure in the only French-American circle—the "amusing" circle—which MacRae could ever hope to penetrate.

But would Sheila ever permit MacRae to stay any length of time in Paris, the city of her past follies? I fancied not, decidedly not. Too many old friends are bad for a husband's ideals. So MacRae would not need the social approval of Maurice de Byrrh. No, I should say nothing about the silly business. De Byrrh must write his five millions off, and serve him right.

I found MacRae and Sheila at lunch at the Colony, at the corner table to the right of the door as you go in. The table was for

four, but Marilyn was not there. Still, I was to see her later on in the day—that is, if she was not avoiding me after last night.

Sheila said she had not seen her that morning. Sheila was looking radiant, not so much because she was happy but because she was in black with a little black Reboux hat which looked like Lucifer's skull-cap but had the effect of making Sheila's face look startlingly fair and saintly and her eyes absurdly bright and childish. I shouldn't be surprised if Sheila, dying at a great old age, would still have her girl's eyes, bright and surprised and expectant and grateful.

MacRae, reading a letter, was smiling. He looked very mischievous, like a boy about to slip a salted almond into his girl's ice-cream to give her a surprise. Then he burst out laughing, folded the letter up, and held it across the table to Sheila.

She smiled nervously, helplessly, absurdly lost in the humour of men.

This "lost" quality of Sheila's, due only to the fact that what brains she had were

sluggish, was to MacRae the lovely flower that Sheila's soul put forth in its struggle for unselfish happiness. He touched her hand lightly, smiling into her nervously blank eyes.

"It's all right, baby. Don't worry yourself."

"And you're not offended . . . I was so frightened when you came in !"

MacRae turned to me, smiling.

"I was early coming here, Andy, but Sheila was earlier. That's a nice change for us, isn't it, for an American woman who is no more than a half-hour late thinks she has been almost kept waiting. Anyway she finds this letter here, sent by someone who doesn't know her address but knows she comes here often. She didn't see me when I came in, and was reading it as though the world had come to an end. Worried, see. Then she sees me and tries to hide the letter, but I persuade her to give it to me if it's something that worries her. Read it, Andy. May he read it, Sheila? I guess you know

this boy too, Andy. He must be one big chump to lose his money on graft he knows nothing about."

Of course the letter was from my yelping countryman, Maurice de Byrrh. I glanced furtively at Sheila. I could feel her trembling, her heart pounding with fear and superstition. Were her sins already beginning to find her out? So soon! Was this letter prophetic, was she never to get away from her past life? For once upon a time Maurice de Byrrh had been one of the young rascals who had attracted Sheila's—how shall one describe it?—acquiescence. Some women go through a phase of helpless acquiescence to men, and at the time they think this is due to their passionate nature, but it is really due to nothing but their condition of loneliness and insecurity. And now that Sheila had at last found anchorage in MacRae's masculine idealism, the Maurice de Byrrhs of life rose yelping behind her. He was yelping for his money, of course.

It is a curious fact that the Maurice de

Byrrhs of life, who want nothing so much as to be known as careless idlers, reckless fellows, but at the same time interested in things of the intellect, and above all as the lovers of notable women, are passionately interested in making money.

“My dear Sheila, you will be surprised to hear from me. But the point is, are you forgetting your old friends in Paris? I hear you are having such a wonderful time in New York that you are never coming back to us. The other day I saw Kiki Gaynac, who has just come back from New York to take a job at Saint-Phalle’s here, and he told me he had seen you at several parties. Now, dear Sheila, I would not dream of bothering you if it wasn’t for something that Kiki Gaynac said. He said he had seen you several times at the house of a man called Charlie MacRae, who appears to be a very well-known person over there—notorious, or so one hears. Kiki didn’t know if this MacRae was a friend of yours or merely an acquaintance,

and that is what I want to ask you, my dear Sheila, because if you like you can do something for me in that quarter . . . ” Then came the same stupid story that Pierre had told me about “ MacRae’s hi-jackers.”

“ Now isn’t that too bad, Andy ? ” MacRae grinned. “ What do you think of it ? ”

“ Very little.”

I gave the letter back to Sheila, who managed to press my hand as she took it. Gratitude, or a call for help ?

“ You’d think I was the only MacRae in the world, wouldn’t you, Andy ? ”

“ Exactly,” I said. “ You don’t have to tell us it’s all nonsense.”

MacRae’s keen brown eyes smiled secretly at me. I could not make the fellow out at all. I had thought he was doing everything possible to hide his activities from Sheila, and here he was looking unusually gay and happy at the prospect of her finding him out to be a highwayman.

“ Sheila,” he smiled, “ you write to your boy friend——”

"He's *not* my boy friend, Charlie!"

"I'm just teasing you, baby. You write and tell him you think he is crazy, because the MacRae you know is a respectable business-man and doesn't even know what a low word like hi-jacker means. See, Sheila?"

"Of course, darling. I'll write him to-day . . . So silly, this kind of thing."

MacRae looked, twinkling, across at me.

"What's this get-rich-quick chump like, Andy?"

Sheila's foot brushed mine.

"He is quite a nice young fellow, MacRae. The sort of young Frenchman you somehow never read about—takes an interest in sport and in nothing else. I hear he is to marry a sweet young girl next month."

"Say, isn't that tough luck to lose all his money in such a darn silly way!"

Without glancing at Sheila, I know she was looking intently down at her plate and that her eyes were faintly moist.

"Sheila, from what Andy says he seems a darn nice boy. What about it?"

MEN DISLIKE WOMEN

"Silly, to write me a letter like that . . ."

"But the poor kid's worried sick, see. Of course I don't know a thing about what he's talking about, but if you like, baby, I might——"

Sheila was agitated. Her eyes assumed a glassy stare. She was trying to seem quite indifferent. Oh, how she hated de Byrrh !

"Charlie dear, why should you do a thing? It's not your business. He's just a silly boy . . ."

"You bet it's not my business, Sheila. But wouldn't you be mighty glad for me to see . . ."

"I shouldn't !" Sheila murmured. The poor girl could not trust her voice. Here was Charlie thinking that the one way he could show his love for her would be to try and help Maurice de Byrrh, whereas she would be grateful if she never in her life saw the little beast again. Maurice de Byrrh of all people, whom she had never really liked ! But if she or I were to tell Charlie that de Byrrh was a little beast,

Charlie would be wondering why a little beast was an old friend of Sheila's. It might be the first pinprick of suspicion. That was what terrified Sheila more than anything, the first pinprick.

"What are you doing after lunch, Andy?" MacRae asked.

I said I was doing nothing. Sheila pressed my foot again. I was to help, was I? And how the devil was I to help? And where was Marilyn all this time? How silly it was! Was she going to avoid me now because she had put up a great bluff of loving me and she knew and I knew that she couldn't keep it up?

Sheila had shopping to do after lunch. MacRae and I got into his limousine. O'Neill sat in front, beside the chauffeur.

"That letter seems to have put you in very good spirits, MacRae."

"Boy!" he said, grinning.

"I can't make you out," I said.

"Simplest thing in the world, Andy. If Sheila ever has to suspicion me I'd just

as soon have her find out from her fine European friends, who are not such angels themselves. It makes it more homelike, do you see ? ”

“ Then these hi-jackers really were your men ? ”

“ Say, Andy, what do you think I am ? If I run a business at all, it’s a respectable, well-conducted organisation. No, sir, they were not my men. Get this into your head, Andy, I’m not in that racket. I’m just a plain business man, see. Tim MacRae is the guy you’re after——”

“ I’m not after him, believe me.”

“ Well, I’m going to have some fun, see. I’d like to do something for one of Sheila’s friends. Women get a kick out of that kind of thing, Andy.”

“ You know a lot about women, don’t you, Charlie ? ”

“ You big stiff ! When a jane sees one-arm MacRae coming the first thing she does is to buy five thousand Radio on margin and open an account at Cartier’s because

she knows MacRae knows such a hell of a lot about women."

The car stopped, and O'Neill opened the door. We were somewhere in the forties, I gathered. My whereabouts in New York were always a mystery to me, since I cannot count, and all the streets looked the same to me except when they were avenues, and then they went sideways and were noisier.

O'Neill looked up and down the sidewalk, and seemed to find something to dislike in the neighbourhood. He was full of dislikes, was O'Neill. MacRae got out of the car, and I followed him.

"What are we doing here, boss?" O'Neill said.

"That's my business," MacRae said.

"You bet your life," O'Neill said. "But I'm coming with you."

MacRae grinned. "Don't worry, O'Neill. I just want to see Bertelli a moment. You stay here. Come on, Andy. No, maybe you'd better stay here."

"You're right he'd better," O'Neill said.

MEN DISLIKE WOMEN

"A big guy like you being scared of Joe Bertelli!" MacRae said.

"Maybe," O'Neill said. "You got to hand it to Bertelli, boss. He's tougher'n hell back of that grin of his."

"I'd like to meet Mr. Bertelli," I ventured, leaving the car.

"You stay where you are, mister," said O'Neill.

So I got back into the car.

By this time MacRae was on his way down a small flight of steps into a basement. He opened a door, and vanished. I had before this been down or up flights of steps into Italian speakeasies, and was not very interested. Oh, the childish boredom of speakeasies!

The huge figure of O'Neill lounged morosely a few paces up the sidewalk and then back again.

"What's the big idea, mister?" he said.

"What is this place?" I said.

"Joe Bertelli's joint. Look here, sir, who's been letting the boss in for this?"

O'Neill had never before called me "sir." But apparently, in his anxiety about MacRae, he had forgotten what was due to himself.

"I don't know anything about it, O'Neill—not even who this Bertelli is."

"Bertelli's a big shot down on the East Side. And he's got all the wops in New York in his pocket. Yes, sir."

O'Neill suddenly thrust his great ugly face into the car. He gave one an impression of extraordinary tenacity and profound bewilderment.

"If the boss don't come out of that joint in three minutes I'm going down to see what the hell's up. Give me the dope on this, sir. MacRae's been a good friend to me, and I don't want anything to happen to him."

"O'Neill, all I know about it is this: some stuff was stolen off a French boat somewhere, and it's got around that the job was done by MacRae's men. That's all I know."

"What the hell!" said O'Neill, frowning.

His concentration was terrific. The mind of the mastodon works slowly.

"That would be Tim MacRae," he said at last. "Sure, Bertelli would have the dope on that."

At that moment MacRae appeared at the basement door, looking very slight beside a huge stout creature. And this creature had the most amiable face I had ever seen, a great fleshy moon of a face wreathed in smiles and little twinkling brown eyes. He waddled up the steps with MacRae.

O'Neill, to my astonishment, had suddenly become an entirely different person—smiling and obsequious.

"Well, Mr. MacRae," the fat man chuckled, "I see you've got your cops with you still."

"You bet your life, Mr. Bertelli," O'Neill said. "We know what's good for us—and what's good for the boss, I guess."

"That's fine, O'Neill. Stop by and have a drink one evening. Always glad to see you boys."

"Sure I will, Mr. Bertelli."

MacRae, still on the sidewalk, made no move to introduce me to his stout and smiling companion. MacRae was not smiling. With his one hand he gave the brim of his black felt hat a twitch downward over his left eye, and said to Bertelli :

"Well, you see how it is, Joe. I've helped you more than once, and now it's up to you to help me. But do as you please."

"Sure, Mr. MacRae, I always tell the boys that Charlie MacRae's the best friend I've got. I'll certainly do what I can. But I got to keep my nose clean, Mr. MacRae—same as everyone else, I got to."

"Joe, you don't have to worry about that when I'm back of you."

"A guy's got to keep his nose clean, Mr. MacRae."

Without another word or another glance at Bertelli, MacRae jumped into the car, and we started off.

"MacRae, what was your stout friend's history about keeping his nose clean?"

MEN DISLIKE WOMEN

"It's sound advice, Andy," MacRae said absently.

"Certainly a gentleman should do no less."

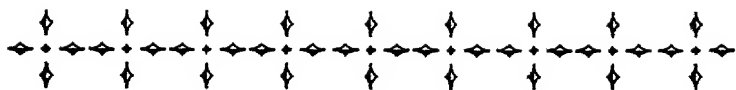
MacRae gave a bark of laughter.

"He wasn't recommending hygiene, Andy, but telling me to mind my own business. Not but that isn't hygiene, too."

The concern of the man O'Neill had somehow affected me, and I should have liked to remind MacRae that it was always a good plan to mind one's own business. But we drove on in silence. He was a mettlesome devil, and I had only to advise him to give up the de Byrrh affair and he would go at it tooth and nail.

The car stopped at the Savoy Plaza, where I had asked to be dropped. MacRae was plunged in thought, and scarcely noticed my departure. O'Neill, beside the driver, without glancing at me, growled :

"Keep your nose clean is right."



• XVI •

To my surprise I found Marilyn waiting for me in my sitting-room. I don't know why, but she gave me an impression of formality. But of course I know why. She gave me an impression of formality because when I came in she was standing by the windows looking out, whereas in the usual way she would be in a heap on the davenport.

"Marilyn, are you paying me a formal afternoon call?"

Marilyn had on a frock like a man's tie, blue with white spots. And she was wearing a vase of flowers on her hat. The vase, flowers and all, was about an inch high, and it was made of diamonds, rubies and emeralds. I never saw it again, so maybe she lost it after that.

"Why didn't you turn up for lunch?" I said.

"Busy," she said.

"It's easy to see you were out with a beau," I said. "There's a light in your eye."

"The light in my eye," she said, "is the light of reflection."

"It suits you, anyhow," I said. But I was disheartened.

She fumbled in her bag. We were both very serious.

"I have come," she said, "to leave a card in acknowledgment of your hospitality last night. See, here's the card. Haven't you got a silver tray? Then I'll leave it on the desk here."

"My hospitality?" I said.

"Your kindness, André."

"For heaven's sake, Marilyn, what are you talking about?"

Oh, she knew all right! She knew exactly what she wanted to say and I knew that nothing on earth was going to stop her saying it. I knew what she wanted to say, too, and I should very much have liked to

save her the trouble. But only stupid words came into my mind.

She sat down at last, but on a hard chair. That was a bad sign, too. Girls like Marilyn, when they choose hard chairs, are up to no good.

"Make yourself comfortable," I said, but without any hope. She didn't, anyhow. To adjust the balance I threw myself down on the davenport and stared up at the ceiling.

"We had a nice lunch at the Colony," I said. "Where did your beau take you?"

"You see," she said thoughtfully, "I'm not a child any more."

"Who said you were?"

"Well, I'm not," she said.

"Have I treated you like a child, Marilyn?"

"Yes," she said.

"Oh, yes?" I said.

Then she lit one of those beastly American cigarettes which, if you are not a smoker yourself, can make a reasonably sized room

uninhabitable in two minutes. But it was not for that reason I frowned at her. If I disapprove of a woman smoking it is not because smoking is bad for her health, which is her business, but because it is bad for me, for it keeps me in suspense.

"I'm so very ashamed of myself, André. I'm ashamed of having been such a bother and I'm ashamed of having piled my miseries on you and I'm ashamed of having used you."

"Used me?" I said. "Don't be so American, Marilyn. Used me, indeed! Of course you haven't used me."

"Do you remember, André, when you jokingly said I was to be your vocation? Well, I have made that joke come true, haven't I? And it's got to stop, André."

"All this is really quite unnecessary, you know, Marilyn."

"Oh honey boy! It would be if you weren't such a sentimentalist."

"A sentimentalist! Me? Have you gone mad, Marilyn?"

A R O M A N C E

"Romantic, too," she said.

"Have you had any lunch at all, Marilyn? I thought not. You are giddy from lack of food."

She looked at me for a long time.

"My sentimental baby!" she said.

"Is this a song or what?"

"My romantic sap!" she said.

"How do you define a sentimental man, Marilyn?"

"A sentimental man," she said, "is a man with only one eye."

"Come closer, Marilyn, and I will show you two. And I've had compliments about them, what's more."

"A sentimental man," she said, "can see out of only one eye, so he can't ever see people as they are."

"That seems to be a good definition," I said. "But even with only one eye, Marilyn, I see a great deal more than you think."

"But, darling, what you see doesn't make sense! I scarcely slept last night thinking what a little beast I had been. It's this

way, André. You are as much of a sap about women as Charlie is. I only made that astonishing discovery last night. And you are more of a sap than Charlie, really. André, do you know where your 'vocation' is leading you? Before you know it you will be marrying Marilyn Fox because you are sorry for the poor little girl—and Marilyn Fox, in the state she was in last night, would be letting you do it. So I've come to tell you it's off, see. Try and look miserable, André."

"You are an extraordinary creature, Marilyn. Suppose I was in love with you."

She laughed merrily. Now I do not like people when they laugh merrily. To laugh merrily is to strike a jarring note. So I frowned at Marilyn, but in return all she did was to smile brightly, and not even the merry laugh strikes such a jarring note as the bright smile. But she did not seem to care. Well, she had said her piece and now a weight was off her mind. So she came

and knelt beside me and her dear grey eyes smiled into mine.

"You're smiling at yourself!" she accused me.

"I'm smiling at you, Marilyn."

"You're wrong, because I'm wise, see."

"You know an awful lot, don't you?"

"Oh, honey!" she said.

"Just a real clever girl!"

"Darling André, I know, as certainly as I know we are sitting here, that a man like you could never love a girl like me, not in a million years. If you could . . ."

She thought profoundly.

"If I could?" I said.

"It would be pretty darn nice," she said.

"Sez you!" I said.

"It would," she said.

"But why, Marilyn, when the only man you love is Charlie?"

"That's maternal, André."

"Oh, hell!" I said.

"I think you're rude," she said.

"Maternal!" I said. "And you know

as well as I do that you love the fellow."

"Yes, I do," she said. "I love him so much that if ever I thought he was in danger or anything I would—well, I'd do anything."

"Maternal my eye!" I said.

"But it isn't my eye, André! Don't you know that Charlie is different from other men—something missing—he's like a child, André——"

"So am I—aren't we all?"

"You are never serious, André. And I don't have any maternal feelings about you, I can tell you."

"That's bad luck for me, I think."

She kissed my cheek. It wasn't what you would call a kiss.

"Maybe it would be good luck for you, André, if you loved me. Maybe we'd go to Paris together, and to the South Seas . . ."

"Let's go, Marilyn."

"André, wouldn't it be grand!"

"Come on, Marilyn, let's go!"

"Darling, what's the use of pretending to

A ROMANCE

love me when you know you are just sorry for me? Let's play fair, see. Oh, I could cry! André, there's a Harold Lloyd at the Paramount. Let's go—come on, André. Here's your hat. Come on quick."

So instead of going to the South Seas we went to the Harold Lloyd picture and laughed till the tears came.

"It's a swell way to get rid of them," Marilyn said.

"I never realised it before," I said, "but Harold Lloyd makes me laugh more than Chaplin."

"Charlie's not such a complete ass as Harold, is he?"

"Chaplin's comedy is a little too poignant for laughter sometimes, because it is always based on criticism of life."

"Speaking of criticism of life, André, do you know you have been holding my hand for the last ten minutes?"

"What of it?" I said. "After all, you are only a child."

"Peculiar morals!" she said.

On the sidewalk in Times Square there was a great crowd, and it was beginning to rain.

"I'll find a taxi," I said.

"No, let's walk. The rain doesn't matter, and I love the crowds on Broadway. André, shall we go some place for tea?"

At that moment I caught sight of O'Neill lumbering along towards us. What was worse, he saw us. He touched his hat to Marilyn and blocked our way. For all the notice he took of me, I might not have been there.

"This is a break," O'Neill said.

"We are in a hurry, O'Neill," I said.

"That's fine," he said. "So am I. Just been round to your hotel to find you, Miss Marilyn."

Marilyn looked startled. Was there some understanding between her and this O'Neill brute? Well, that was a nice thing.

"What is it, O'Neill?" Marilyn said.

"I'd like to see you a minute, Miss Marilyn—alone."

Marilyn turned swiftly to me. She was in a hurry all right. Grey eyes, why are you so anxious?

"I will see you later, André."

"But why need you go with this brute?" I said.

"Dear, he's not a brute to me and Charlie. It was my father who got him his job as a cop, and he has always been devoted to me. Will you be in around seven?"

"I'm dining with Isabella," I said.

"Then I'll call you, André."

O'Neill was holding the door of a yellow cab open for her. Marilyn was extraordinarily swift in getting in. You would have thought it was a matter of life and death. O'Neill said something to the driver in a low growl. He did not want me to hear the address. Then I was left alone. Well, this was a nice way for Marilyn and me to have tea together.

Marilyn had not telephoned by a quarter-past seven, and I was due at Isabella's at

half-past. For some reason I was worried. I rang up Sheila, but she was alone and hadn't seen Marilyn and hadn't heard from MacRae and she was worried because MacRae always rang her up about half-past six. She said she was waiting in. I didn't say anything in particular.

Then I rang up MacRae's apartment. I think it was Hangar who answered, and he said MacRae was not there.

"Do you know when Mr. MacRae will be in?"

"I don't."

"Is he coming in for dinner?"

"No."

"Do you think he is at Great Neck?"

"Don't know."

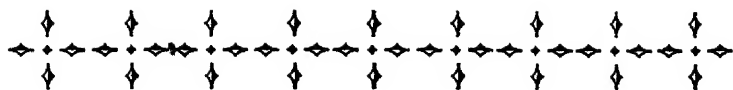
"Has Miss Fox been there?"

"Don't know."

"Say 'sir,'" I said.

"Don't know."

"Thanks a lot," I said.



• XVII •

ISABELLA had pledged her word to me on the telephone that it was to be a small informal dinner party. At least, that was what I had understood, and so I went in a black tie. It was a party of sixteen and all the men looked like very distinguished gentlemen in white ties and white waistcoats. There is one very curious thing about American men. On the whole they are uncommonly badly dressed, particularly since they spend so much on their clothes, but when it comes to a show-down they are always a little better dressed than you are. This is disconcerting. Anyhow, trust dear Isabella to have everything *de rigueur*. If your husband doesn't make you happy, take it out of your guests.

Well, it had been a mouldy day, and it was to be a worse night. Of course I did

not know that, but throughout dinner my thoughts bothered me. Where had Marilyn got to? And MacRae? Why hadn't MacRae telephoned Sheila at half-past six, as he did every evening? Why had Hangar been more than unusually unpleasant on the telephone? What had O'Neill wanted to say to Marilyn so urgently?

I had an uncomfortable feeling that Maurice de Byrrh was somehow mixed up in all this. What a pest that fellow was! Next time I saw him in Paris I should pass on to him Mr. Bertelli's refined maxim about keeping his nose clean. But, after all, the little pest was yelping for his own money. It was to one-armed MacRae that advice had been politely tendered. Well, if ever there was a man who could take care of himself, where men were concerned, it was Charlie MacRae. But I didn't like to think of Sheila alone in her apartment waiting to hear the telephone bell ring and her lover's voice. She wouldn't go out or

do anything, just sit there waiting for the bell to ring. And it wouldn't, just because she so frightfully wanted it to.

After dinner I found Crabb Hunter sipping a glass of port beside me. Crabb was not an amusing companion, but you would have to search a long time before finding a man so upright and reliable. He was a partner in the same brokerage house as Pierre, and I understood he was hopelessly devoted to Isabella, whom he had known since childhood and whom he always treated as his superior. Well, all he had got for his pains was that she had not married him but Pierre. Why had she not married Crabb Hunter? How stupid she had been, and now she was paying for it. But women are funny, and maybe she thought it was right for her to suffer.

"André, do you know MacRae well?" Hunter said in his heavy way. "I'll tell you why I ask. MacRae plays the market in a big way, and now it looks like something has happened to make him quit."

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“ At a profit ? ”

“ Sure, but it doesn't do any good to have a big operator like MacRae suddenly dump his stocks on the market. I thought maybe you would know whether he was planning to leave the country for a long holiday or something.”

“ I think perhaps he is, Crabb.”

He sat twiddling with the stem of his glass.

“ What's on your mind, Crabb ? ”

“ There have been signs lately of a big drive against the stocks MacRae has got holdings in. Maybe he's gotten wise to it, and that's why he is clearing out. I just thought maybe you would tell him not to worry, as he has got a lot of good friends downtown. I don't have much to do with MacRae personally, but he has always dealt squarely by us.”

“ I'll tell him,” I said.

I managed to slip away a little after ten. The only message for me at the hotel was that Mrs. Hepburn had telephoned me at

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half-past nine and would I call her back. But I didn't. Anyhow, I could only add to her anxiety.

I sat down to read. About a quarter of an hour later the telephone rang and the clerk downstairs said Miss Fox wanted to speak to me.

"Is she downstairs?" I asked.

Marilyn's voice said: "I thought you might be in bed, André. Aren't you? Well, I'll be up."

She came in, her little hat carried limply in her hand. She dropped it on a chair, and ran her fingers absently through her crisp curly hair. She was lazy and tired and absent-minded.

"Got a comb, André?"

She followed me into the bedroom and combed her hair. I stared at her face in the mirror, and sat helplessly on the side of the bed. She looked different. She looked surprisingly and terribly different. She looked older, for one thing. But she looked more different than that, too. And

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so I stared at her helplessly. And I said a silly thing.

"Something has happened to you, Marilyn."

She smiled vaguely, as though I had spoken in Chinese. Her grey eyes were quite empty and lifeless, as though Marilyn had gone away somewhere and had left them behind to hold the fort in case tiresome questions were asked. I wanted to ask tiresome questions, but I felt there was no one in Marilyn's body to answer them. So I asked idiotic ones instead.

"Have you had any dinner, Marilyn?"

"Yes, I dined with Charlie."

"At his apartment?"

"Yes."

"When I rang up they said he was out."

"He didn't want to be disturbed."

"I see," I said.

She put her lipstick away and we went back into the sitting-room.

Why had MacRae not telephoned Sheila when he could so easily have done so?

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It seemed a cruel thing to do, knowing she would be waiting in and getting desperately anxious.

Marilyn lay on the davenport with her knees up, smoking a cigarette. She had a ladder in her stockings. Somehow that seemed to emphasise the beauty of her long slender legs. I felt she was a million miles away, and searched helplessly for something to say.

Suddenly, as though she had made up her mind about something, and with very quick movements, she lit a cigarette.

"Charlie wanted me to stay," she said, "but I said I had left you so abruptly this afternoon that you might be waiting for me. Charlie's sick, André. He asked me to tell you he would like to see you to-night if you can manage it."

"Did he say what he wanted to see me about?"

"It's about me, I think. He's awful sick, André."

She looked at me for the first time. I saw

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she was trying so desperately hard to be matter-of-fact. I smiled at her helplessly.

"Marilyn, I wish you hadn't come here to-night."

"But I had to, André. It's only fair."

"Is it?" I said. "All the same I wish you had said good-bye on the telephone and left it at that."

"Yes, it's good-bye, André."

"I knew," I said.

"How did you know, André?"

"I never did like that O'Neill," I said.

"He is bad news, Marilyn, so I knew something was up. And I'll tell you another thing, Marilyn. I am not going to see Charlie to-night."

"But you must, André! He's sick and he wants to see you urgently."

"Maybe he does, Marilyn, but I don't think I want to see him. I have become bound up in your lives in a queer way, but not to such a degree that——"

"Don't say it, André! Please don't say it!"

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"I am going to say it, Marilyn, because you have done something unpardonable. And so has Charlie, but I can't be bothered about Charlie so much. Marilyn, I never dreamt you could do this."

"Darling, darling, you don't know!"

"I do know, Marilyn dear, and I'm terribly sorry for you. I'm terribly sorry for you both, but most of all I am hurt for Sheila's sake."

"Yes, that's why I was scared to tell you."

"And why shouldn't you be scared, Marilyn? You have committed a great sin against Sheila, and God help you. She is a much older woman than you are, and much lonelier, and much stupider, and you have taken about her last chance of happiness away. That is something to be frightened about."

Tears started in her eyes.

"André, you're not fair! You're not fair, André!"

"We are none of us fair, Marilyn, when

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we are hurt. Have you been fair about Sheila to-night? God knows what you have told that lunatic!"

She said: "But I had to, André! You don't understand."

I said: "How you could bring yourself to go sneaking to him about Sheila's life in Paris, I simply can't imagine. Why the hell couldn't you mind your own business? You are pretty contemptible, Marilyn. And now you are trying to tell me you couldn't help it."

She was not crying now. She looked at me indifferently, as though she was past hating me. When the heart is hurt, it beats to a childish rhythm. And to this rhythm it seems a good thing to hate everyone, so that then everyone shall hate us, and then we shall go happily on our own way without bothering about anything. Thus children are made, and so are we all.

She said: "I thought maybe you would understand."

"I do understand, Marilyn. But I think

you should know you have done an unforgivable thing.”

“It’s curious you don’t understand,” she said indifferently. Then she got up quickly and picked up her hat. I sat where I was. She began fitting on her hat at the mirror over the fireplace. Those small tight hats take more putting on than you would think. A touch, a twist, a wrench, a pull and a jab. Then repeat backwards. I saw that the vase of flowers was not on it now.

“You have lost the brooch in your hat,” I said.

Turning, she felt round her hat with vague fingers. Then she picked up her bag and went towards the door.

I sat where I was. At the door she half turned. She was thoughtful and indifferent. Well, that was that.

“You can please yourself about going to see Charlie,” she said. “I’m not going there again to-night, so you needn’t be afraid of being contaminated. I’m not going to defend myself about Sheila, either.

She has got what she deserved for trying to cheat a man like Charlie. People shouldn't cheat. But I should never have told him anything about her if O'Neill hadn't told me that Charlie would be having gunmen after him if he didn't mind his own business. Then I heard someone had been imposing on Charlie's good-nature and then I heard it was Sheila who had put him up to risking his life because of some dirty little French friend of hers and then I lost my temper. Good-bye."

"And I'm left with the job of telling Sheila it's all over?"

"That's as you like. Charlie and I are getting married to-morrow or the day after in Connecticut."

"Isn't that pretty silly, Marilyn, when you know he doesn't love you?"

She smiled coldly.

"I'm all he's got, anyway," she said.

That lovely tired little face! She was trying so hard not to look desperate. I went quickly to her and took her hand. She

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swayed ever so slightly. Her hand struggled to get away, but I held it firmly.

"It's good-bye, honey," she said.

"Grey eyes, what a fool you are!"

She said: "I'm doing right, André. What will happen to him if I don't take care of him? You don't know how sick he is!"

"But you must think of yourself, too," I said.

"If I did," she said, "Charlie would be on my conscience all my life."

"To hell with Charlie!" I said.

How strange women are! She seemed suddenly to grow up. She smiled, with careful tenderness.

"Now don't let's start flirting again," she said, and went away.



• XVIII •

I PACED up and down for a long time. But when I looked at the clock it showed only a quarter past eleven. So Marilyn could not have been with me for more than half an hour. Well, a great deal had happened in that time. What a pleasant helpful conversation we had had. And so she was going to marry MacRae. I knew she would, too. It was cowardice, really. She hadn't the courage to tell herself she did not love MacRae any longer. No, it wasn't cowardice but a kind of fundamental good manners. That's a powerful motive. How often men and women take advantage of each other's interior good manners !

I sat down and pulled the telephone towards me, but sat there without taking off the receiver. What a fool I had been to mix myself in all this. What a fool I had

been to promise old Pete Fox to tell him if MacRae was going to marry Marilyn. I had told him it couldn't happen, and I had given my word to let him know if it was going to happen, and now it was going to happen. Well, it put me in a nice mess.

It would be a terrible thing to ring up the old man and tell him that MacRae and his daughter were getting married, after all. It was a terrible thing to do to an old man. But I had promised, and he had believed me, and—what was worse—he had faith in me. I sat there going over the many promises I had broken in my life. "When I give my word," says a man, "I always do a thing." Oh, zut! Everyone breaks promises, and I had broken my share, and why shouldn't I break this? I told myself that the laws of society are based on one undefined but unassailable certainty, and that is that promises are made to be broken. Well, but I wasn't in or of society, and what's more I loathed it, and if I was a man instead of a slacker I should fight against

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it tooth and nail, and old Pete Fox wasn't in or of society either. Here we were, a French tramp and an American tramp, and how about that promise?

And as I sat there old Pete Fox sat very near me, with his big heavy face and his muddy laughter and his loneliness. It was a nice thing for an old man to have the peace of his last years broken to bits. Well, he should have known better than to put all his eggs into one basket. A husky old fellow like that should have known better than to have only one child, and then Marilyn would not have had such power over his heart. All the same, it was a nice thing for a lonely old man to have his darling snatched from him by a man he hated and despised.

Marilyn said I was a sentimentalist and that I couldn't see people out of my two eyes, but I saw Pete Fox out of my two eyes all right, and I liked him. I liked him because of his forcefulness, and I liked him because that forcefulness was just a

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mask over his weak character, and I liked the rich rank blood in him that drove him where he didn't want to go. And I liked his dignity, even though it was a false dignity, but all the same it was the big and serious dignity of a man who has fallen down and is damned if he is going to let anyone know it. And I liked his big handsome head, too.

I pulled the telephone nearer to me, and then I found myself by the door. I was in the elevator before I realised I had made up my mind to go to see MacRae. And what in the world had I to say to the fellow? Well, I should say to him: "I gave my word to Pete Fox to let him know if ever this should happen. I just thought it right to tell you I am going to telephone to him to-night, and now be damned to you and good-night." The fellow would give his twisted leathery grin, and that would be that. Why the dickens had I ever left Isabella's side? I shouldn't have been in this mess if I had let Isabella go on "plan-

ning everything out" for me. I realised I was praying for something to happen to prevent me telephoning to old Pete Fox, or to make it unnecessary.

Leaving the hotel, I came face to face with Sheila coming in.

Well, we were having a nice day. I just stood staring at her and she stood staring at me, getting in the way of people behind her. She was in an ermine wrap, and that silly word "dazzling" came into my mind and that silly song came into my head: "All dressed up and no place to go." Trust Sheila to have no place to go just when you were busy.

I had been thinking of Sheila as waiting at home distraught, and here she was looking as lovely as I had ever seen her. She didn't look distraught at all, but just her usual blank and lovely self, maybe a little blanker than usual. Trust Sheila not to know what it was all about.

"André! I was just coming to see you."

Oh, she would be!

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"And I was just going out, Sheila," I said, but without any hope, and of course she came in, and we sat in two easy chairs in the lounge.

"Well, Sheila, here we are."

Put two blue flowers in the window of a house and go outside and look at the house, and there you have Sheila. There she was, blank and lovely, and there were her glorious flowery eyes, and you could look into them all you liked, and they never meant a thing.

She said : "I've been waiting in all evening, dear, and then I couldn't wait any more."

Well, this was a nice situation. What on earth was I to say to her? There she sat in all her radiant loveliness, waiting for me to give her inside information.

She said : "André, I rang up Charlie, and he wouldn't speak to me."

She sat waiting for me to explain this.

"I'm afraid something has happened, Sheila."

She said : "But what shall I do, André?"

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She sat waiting for me to tell her.

"I'm afraid there is nothing you can do, Sheila."

Those great clear liquid eyes exasperated and, at the same time, humiliated me. There was such muddled bewilderment behind them, but also such infinite faith in my ability to do something.

She said: "Do you know anything, André? Anything . . . definite?"

She sat waiting for me to tell her that everything was all right. Well, everything wasn't.

"Marilyn has been to see me," I said.

Her fingers plucked nervously at the pearls round her throat.

She said: "He wouldn't speak to me when I rang up. Did I tell you that, André?"

I didn't say anything.

She said: "Maybe Marilyn was with him when I telephoned. Just imagine, he wouldn't speak to me. Did she say anything, André?"

"Sheila, I simply don't know what to

say. I'm going to see MacRae now. Maybe I can tell you more to-morrow."

"To-night, André! You must tell me to-night. Oh, you must."

"I'll do what I can, Sheila."

She sat plucking at her pearls and staring at me, groping. You would have thought that such radiant fairness would have helped her to see her way among the ruins. But it didn't at all. The trouble was that she had no opinion of herself. And so she was lost.

She said: "What did Marilyn say, André? Do tell me, dear." She smiled desperately. "It's been such an awful day, hasn't it—awful!"

"Sheila, you were very unwise to confide in Marilyn."

She shivered a little, and drew her ermine more closely round her. She gave a little senseless laugh.

She said: "But she couldn't have told Charlie, André! She couldn't! I know Marilyn—she's nice, straightforward."

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I got up helplessly. Well, what was there to say to that !

"I must go now, Sheila, if I'm to see Charlie."

She said : " But Marilyn likes me, André —I know she does."

She sat waiting for me to confirm this. I couldn't get a word out.

She said : " So how could she tell Charlie ? I'm sure you are wrong, André."

" Perhaps I'm wrong, Sheila."

She gave that silly little laugh again.

She said : " Men can say such dreadful things about women without thinking."

" I really shall have to go now, Sheila. All I can say is that there has been some stupid misunderstanding somewhere. I'll drop you at your hotel, Sheila."

We walked towards the door. She stopped suddenly, staring at me with those maddeningly uncomprehending eyes.

" But what shall I do if he won't see me again, André ? "

And she stood waiting for me to tell

her. What on earth could I tell her?

She said: "It takes the breath away—coming suddenly like this—doesn't it? I never thought . . . What shall I do, André, all alone here?"

"I'm here, too, Sheila, aren't I? Two fools together. You won't be quite alone, dear. Come, I must take you home now."

She said: "But I haven't seen anyone except Charlie for weeks and weeks! And weeks! I simply can't realise . . ."

In the taxi she said:

"I mustn't complain, André. I've been so frightfully happy these last few weeks, and it couldn't last, could it? Could it, André?"

"Nothing lasts," I said. Well, I was completely *abruti*.

She said: "Yes, only I thought . . . I didn't think it would come so soon. André, I simply can't imagine not seeing Charlie again. You don't know how a woman of my age . . . Do you think I shall ever see him again, André?"



• XIX •

O'NEILL opened the door, first opening it an inch to examine the visitor. I had had quite enough of O'Neill that day to last me a lifetime. Confound and blast O'Neill. The absence of noise in the apartment was pleasant, and at the same time seemed strange. I threw my hat on a chair and made towards the study door. O'Neill lumbered after me. Exasperated, I turned sharply on him.

"What is it, O'Neill?"

"Are you sore at me?" he asked.

"I'm in a hurry to see Mr. MacRae."

"He's in there expecting you, mister. What's left of him, anyway."

The fellow was formidably solemn. There was something ludicrous about the concentrated earnestness on that massive face.

"He told Norris and Hangar to get out,"

he said. "I'm staying till he pulls a gat on me, and then I guess I'll stay anyway."

I realised he was trying to conciliate me in the interests of his master. Well, he gave his master service. The mastodon protected the wolf. There was something very nice about O'Neill, after all.

"No, I'm not sore at you, O'Neill, but at myself for having told you anything this afternoon."

"What you want to do now," he whispered hoarsely, "is to persuade him to laugh it off."

"Laugh what off?"

"That blondino, mister."

Blondino? Blonde? Sheila?

"Are you against her, too, O'Neill?"

"Women is all alike, sir—except maybe Miss Marilyn, and she's only a kid yet. Say, listen. I guess you sheik 'em plenty——"

"I do what, O'Neill?"

"The dames, mister. Now what you want to do is to sheik this blonde and have her lay off of Charlie . . ."

The pathetic cave-man !

In the study, to my surprise, I found MacRae not at his writing-table, but pacing to and fro. In his feverish activity, with his one arm, he looked pathetically slight and worn. At my entrance he jerked round, stared, then continued his pacing.

He said nothing, and I said nothing. He was under a tremendous strain and could hardly control himself. He almost stumbled now and then.

There was nothing for me to do but to make my mind a blank, say what I had to say, and go. But I couldn't make my mind a blank, and I couldn't say what I had to say, and I couldn't go. So I sat down.

MacRae went on pacing quickly to and fro. I wished he would stop. Then he did stop, and he stared at me.

I said : " That's a dirty look, MacRae."

He said : " I didn't think you would do a thing like this, Andy. Men owe something to each other, don't they? Am I right, Andy—or am I right? "

What was the use of arguing? The fellow was sick. I said nothing.

He said: "Well, it's my own fault for trying to make a friend of a Frenchman. Christ, if a man like me doesn't stick to his own kind he deserves to get hell knocked out of him. And you certainly done that—between you."

"You don't know what you are saying, MacRae."

He said: "Men owe something to each other, don't they? By God, is the world so sick that a man can't trust his friends?" He stood by the writing-table, his one hand clutching at the edge so that the knuckles showed white. The rims of his eyes were red, and I saw that he had been crying. He looked very ill.

"Andy, I've liked you a whole lot. I thought you were my friend."

"I'm not apologising for anything, MacRae."

"Well, you've certainly got me licked—you and Sheila. Why didn't you tell me

about her? You've no right to do a thing like that, Andy. For God's sake! I'm not blaming her, mind you. A dame like that has got to work for all she can get——"

"MacRae, listen to me a moment. Don't go off on that tack. Listen, MacRae. You are quite wrong about her."

He said: "How in hell am I wrong about her when I know and you know and everyone knows that she's a whore."

Beads of perspiration stood on his leathery forehead. There was no sense in him. I said nothing.

He said: "A man like you, Andy, who thinks it no harm to try and bluff a friend into marrying a woman like that, doesn't know a thing about ideals and love and—children. Say, is that funny? Is it so darn funny to fall for a lovely pure woman and want children so that you are sick with wanting? Well, if that's funny then my name is Harpo Marx and all you wise guys can go to hell and rot there with your dirty women."

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He stood staring at me as though I was not there. He was staring at the silly, lovely shapes of his dead hopes. There were tears in his eyes.

He said : " I'm broken up, Andy, I'm broken up. I've been waiting for Sheila ever since I could think, and I get a woman who has been in bed with——"

" Will you stop that now, MacRae ! "

He said : " I will not stop it, Andy, you tricky son of a bitch. Almighty God, man, how could you do it ? Only last night you sat here saying what a grand time Sheila and I would have in Europe together—and as you said it, you must have known that a whole lot of the men I'd meet there had been her lovers."

" I'm sorry, MacRae. It may sound stupid to say that now, but there it is. All I can say is that, since knowing you, Sheila has changed."

He pressed his hand against his eyes as though to clear them. I got up to go. There was no sense in him.

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He said : " Sit down a moment, Andy."

" I'm going," I said.

He said : " Will you tell her something from me? Tell her I don't blame her at all."

" No, I won't, MacRae. I've done my best, and I've made a nice mess, and I'm through. You must do your own dirty work, MacRae."

" Sit down a moment, Andy. Will you tell her I don't blame her at all? I guess it's up to every man to know what he's about when he's courting, and if I hadn't been so wet behind the ears maybe I'd have known the sort of woman she was right away. Tell her I don't blame her, Andy."

" What is the use, MacRae? What comfort will she get from that? "

He said : " You don't know what I've been through to-night, Andy. What is it that gets a man so that he's sick and helpless and hurt? What is it that makes a guy like me feel he's fallen off the edge of the

world? Would it be jealousy, Andy? Would it be jealousy of all those other men? Andy, it's not just that. Jealousy's hell all right, but there's worse than jealousy. I've been crying like a kid to-night, Andy. Would you say that was just because I'm so sorry for myself? Well, maybe, but it's a man's dreams that cry out inside him, Andy. A man doesn't know what a bunch of kid's toys he's full of till something comes along and kicks the pants off him. Dreams are fine to swallow, Andy, but they make a rotten stench when you retch them out."

"Have you given a thought to what Sheila will feel about this, MacRae?"

He said: "I guess we'll both get over it, She'll get over it, Andy. Gosh, I feel empty inside! I feel the clock has stopped and I don't give a damn if it never starts again. Ever had that feeling, Andy? I'll bet you haven't. Your sort know too much about women to feel the way I feel. But there's another thing, Andy. I've been so up in the air about Sheila since I met her that

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I don't even know if she's rich^c or poor. This is pretty delicate, Andy. I'd be glad of your advice. She has been staying at a darn expensive hotel and maybe expecting . . . Do I give her a present, Andy? "

"No, you don't," I said.

"Andy, I'd not like to have her think I was falling down on her."

"Look here, MacRae, it's not necessary for you to think of Sheila in that way. You will be happier about it if you can get it into your head that Sheila has never done anything—profitable."

He said: "Yeah, a whole lot happier. Isn't that wonderful!"

"Have it your own way, MacRae. I see it's no use trying to explain to you that a woman like Sheila, even though she has had lovers, is worthy of your devotion. If I loved her, she would have all mine. But we are all made different, so there it is."

He said: "Andy, I'm finding out that there is a whole lot about life I don't know. And there's a hell of a lot I don't want to know."

I said: "Well, it's scarcely my place to teach a laundryman anything, but how about this? Chastity isn't everything, MacRae. And you've got confounded impudence to insist on it. Galahads like you put such a high value on your respect for women that a poor mortal woman has to be a liar to win you. What business is it of yours that Sheila has had lovers? Do you think an ordinary normal woman of thirty-five is going to live in a stained-glass window because she's one day going to meet a man mean enough to want 'all' of her? You are so selfish, MacRae, that you make me sick."

He said: "Listen, Andy. There's no man so bad but there's not some good in him, if it's only a kid's dream. Take that away from him and what's left? By God, Andy, you're a grand friend for a man to have!"

"Well, that's that," I said.

"A hell of a friend!"

"MacRae," I said, "I gave my word to

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Pete Fox to let him know at once whenever I heard that you and Marilyn were getting married."

Again he pressed his one hand against his eyes.

He said : " I had the great idea that you and Marilyn might get together, Andy. That was one grand idea, wasn't it? What a chance a clean little kid like Marilyn would have with a guy like you. And she's half in love with you, too."

" That's not true, MacRae."

" Are you in love with her, Romeo? "

" No," I said. Be damned to the fellow. Why should I give him any satisfaction?

" Andy, don't you ever tell the truth? Anyway, I wouldn't let her marry a four-flusher like you if you were the last man on earth. You and Sheila should get together, Andy. Marilyn and I will get on fine. She's always wanted to go to the South Seas, so I guess we'll go. Sure, we'll get on fine."

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I said : " The reason I've come here to-night, MacRae, is to tell you that, as I have given my word, I shall have to ring up Pete Fox to tell him about you and Marilyn."

He said : " Sure, go ahead."

Then something happened. His head seemed to jerk up, become alive, intent. He was dealing with men again, something he knew about.

He said : " What's that? I didn't get that."

I repeated what I had said.

He said : " So old Pete made you promise that? "

One could feel, behind those hurt exhausted eyes, his mind whirring and racing, thinking things out sharply and defiantly. He knew what he was at now, dealing with a man, something he knew about.

He said : " Old Pete's a great guy. He never lets go. So he made you promise that? "

" Very earnestly," I said.

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He sat down in the worn leather chair at the writing-table. He was completely absorbed, thinking things out. I looked at my watch, and saw it was half-past twelve. I realised that I was tired, too.

"I must be going," I said.

This did not wake him up out of his absorption. He merely said: "Wait just one minute, Andy."

We seemed to have sat there a long time, but maybe it was only three minutes later that he turned to me with something of his old mischievous grin.

He said: "That's fine, Andy. You call Pete Fox and tell him. Will you call him as soon as you get back to the hotel?"

"But won't it be too late now?"

"Too late for old Pete? You bet he'll be sitting up with Johnnie Walker getting the low-down on Al Tennyson. You call him, Andy."

"You really want me to, MacRae?"

"Sure! It's a swell idea! I wonder I didn't think of it myself."

A ROMANCE

"Then why don't you call him yourself?" I asked.

"I thought you promised him, Andy."

"Oh, all right," I said, and rose to go. I couldn't make the fellow out. Since the mention of Pete Fox he had been completely absorbed, as though in some swift keen calculation. What was he up to now? But I was dead tired, and all I wanted was to be alone.

He said: "There's one thing I'd like you to tell him, Andy. And pass this on as coming from me. He'll understand. After you tell him I want to see him just say 'fire.' He'll understand. Just 'fire'—and say I told you."

What was the fellow talking about now? Fire? Just say "fire"?

I said: "Fire? I just say 'fire'?"

"You tell him I want to see him first, Andy. He'll understand. Now you do that, Andy."

"Do you mean to say that he will be coming to see you at this time of night?"

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"Sure, why not? We don't think such a hell of a lot of sleeping as you Europeans do."

"Well, anything for a quiet life," I said. "I am going now."

"And you'll call Pete Fox? Tell him I'm marrying Marilyn, see. And don't forget about that code word 'fire.'"

I said: "Damn Pete Fox and damn you all and I hope you all burn. If you don't sleep well to-night, MacRae, you can console yourself with the thought that poor Sheila won't sleep at all, thanks to you. Good-night to you."

He sat there with his eyes boring into me. This concentration was like a heavy weight on my tiredness.

He said: "It's good-bye, Andy."

"Well, good-bye," I said, and as he did not offer to shake hands, I went out.

O'Neill, sitting on a chair in the hall, looked up. My expression, whatever it was, seemed to tell him something, for after one glance at me he lowered his eyes again and

sat waiting for me to go. For the first time I found myself thinking of O'Neill in terms of years. He looked an old man. Maybe it was because I was tired that I lingered.

"Come and see me before I sail, O'Neill. I'll be going next week."

"I'll be round," O'Neill said, making to rise from his chair, but I put a hand on his shoulder and kept him where he was.

Then down the passage behind me the study door opened and MacRae came swinging towards me.

Yes, that was the way he always walked when he was up to something, swinging along. He was up to something now all right. It was strange and sad, the feeling I had that I should never again see that pathetic one-armed swagger of his.

I said: "Isn't this a fine ending to a lovely day!"

The ghost of that shy unsure smile flickered across his face as he held out his hand to me.

He said: "Good-bye, Andy. The

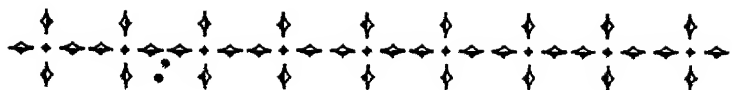
MEN DISLIKE WOMEN

world's not a worse place because Charlie MacRae has gotten what's been coming to him for years."

"You've got Marilyn," I said.

He was smiling. The last I saw of the fellow he was smiling.

"Maybe," he said. "Good-bye, son. Good luck, you bastard."



• XX •

PIERRE, of course, was on the spot in no time. His elder brother had pointed out his mistakes too often for Pierre to lose such a grand opportunity.

“It’s awkward,” Pierre said, “that you were about the last person to see him last night.”

“His man was there,” I said.

“The best thing for you to do,” Pierre said, “is to ring up the District Attorney and tell him all you know.”

“But I don’t know anything !” I said.

And I didn’t know anything. Well, what did I know ? I had last seen MacRae at half-past twelve the night before. At six o’clock this morning MacRae had been found by his man O’Neill sitting at his writing-table with a bullet through his head and a revolver near his hand. Well, that was that.

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It was now three o'clock in the afternoon. The early afternoon papers were screaming the news. Charlie MacRae, dead or alive, was enormous news-value. But there was a certain note of regret in the clamour. It was so obviously a case of suicide, it was so obviously not a sensational murder.

I had rushed round to see Sheila, who was quite stupefied. What was to be done about Sheila now? What on earth was I to do about Sheila?

Pierre said: "Isabella and her father will be horrified if your name gets into the papers in connection with this."

When Sheila at last managed to grasp what it was all about . . . well, she would collapse. What on earth was I to do with her? If only she had a decently competent woman friend!

I said: "Tell Isabella not to worry, Pierre. MacRae wasn't the man to bother his friends in that way. There is no reason why I should come into it at all. In one paper it reports that the telephone-operator

in the apartment-house says that MacRae rang down at half-past two to ask the time. I left him at half-past twelve."

"Perhaps," Pierre said, "he was depressed about his losses on the market."

"Probably that's it," I said. What had he said when I'd said: "You've got Marilyn." He had said: "Maybe." Well, "maybe" was right. And he had smiled. And then he had shot himself. The fellow was a comedian.

Pierre was just about to go when the door opened and O'Neill came lumbering in. I had been expecting O'Neill all day. The poor old bloke. There was a bond between O'Neill and me. He stopped on seeing Pierre, and stared stupidly at him.

I said: "Sit down, O'Neill."

"I'll wait outside till you're alone, mister."

He looked so old and tired and muddled.

"Sit down and have a drink, O'Neill. My brother is just going."

He sat down on a chair near the door, a great clumsy bewildered man. I made a

sign to Pierre to repress his curiosity and not ask any questions. So he started to go.

"I'd be glad of a drink," O'Neill said.

I gave him a stiff whisky, almost neat. MacRae had always seen to it that I should have drinks in my room, saying that though I didn't drink myself my friends might like to.

"I think I'll have a drink too," Pierre said.

"Not here," I said. "I want to talk to O'Neill."

When Pierre had gone, O'Neill and I sat in silence for a long time. Well, there was a bond between us. Then I said :

"O'Neill, how is it you left him alone?"

"I spent the night downstairs, mister, sitting with the telephone-operator. I guess that's why I'm so tired now. This Scotch has done me good. Charlie gave it you, I guess. After you left he told me to get to hell out of the apartment. He could always do what he liked with me, so in the end I had to go. I thought it would be all right, see,

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sitting with the operator downstairs, where I could see everybody who came in. I never thought of the fire-escape."

I said: "You never thought of *what*, O'Neill?"

"The fire-escape's handy," he said.

"The fire-escape?" I said.

"That's right, mister."

"Handy?" I said. "What the dickens is the fire-escape handy for apart from a fire?"

"Climb up without being seen, mister. It's a bit of a climb, of course, but not too bad if you take your time."

"Who takes whose time?" I said.

"I've done it," he said, "when I didn't want anyone to see me coming in."

"O'Neill," I said, "why are you talking this way when you know it was suicide?"

"Yeah," O'Neill said.

"O'Neill," I said, "will you stop being an infernal idiot and tell me what's in your mind?"

"Sure it was suicide, mister. And that's

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what I told the cops, wasn't it? I said to them he was crazy with depression. And that's what you want to tell them, too."

"I will, naturally, since it's the truth. Don't you remember, as I was leaving, how he said 'Maybe'? Of course it's the truth, O'Neill."

"Yeah," he said thoughtfully. "Ain't the truth wonderful!"

I said: "O'Neill, have you gone daft?"

Since sitting down he had done nothing but stare stupidly at the floor. Now for the first time he looked up at me. There was a great heaviness in his eyes.

"What did you do, sir, after leaving us last night?"

"Came here to bed and slept. I was dead tired. Why?"

He shifted his eyes from me. There was a great heaviness on them, and they moved slowly. Following their direction, I saw them come to rest on the telephone.

O'Neill stared at the telephone. I stared at O'Neill.

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He said : " And you didn't call anyone ? "

I said : " I did not."

" Charlie didn't ask you to call anyone ? "

" He did not, O'Neill."

" You're sure, mister ? "

" Confound it, man, haven't I just told you ! "

He lowered his gaze to the floor again, and we sat in silence for a long time.

" What you want to do," he said at last, " is to stick to that story."

" It's easy," I said, " to stick to the truth."

" That's right, mister. You keep your nose clean, see ? Charlie wanted everyone to think it was suicide, didn't he ? You and I know different, but what the hell ! You've just told me a lie about not calling anyone up on the telephone last night——"

" O'Neill," I said, " it was not a lie."

" You stick to that, mister. It's okay with me. I've been talking to the telephone-operator downstairs, see ? I told her I was a detective and wanted to see a list of the

calls put through from here last night between half after twelve and one. That's how I know you put a call through to Port Washington at a quarter of one."

I said: "I wanted to talk to Miss Marilyn."

"Sure, sir. Why not?"

I said: "O'Neill, what the devil are you talking about? Come on, out with it."

"Don't get sore, mister. I'd be glad of another drop of this Scotch. Then I'll be going."

I poured it out for him. He didn't gulp it down, but sat tasting it.

"I can't imagine," I said, "why you are going on like this, O'Neill, when it's such a clear case—down to the fact that he used his own revolver."

It took O'Neill a long time to finish his whisky. Then he rose clumsily, and very carefully put the glass down on the table beside me.

He said: "I'll be going now. Thanks for the drink. How about taking me to

I said nothing. O'Neill stood fingering the brim of his billycock.

He said : " I've been a detective myself, and I know how they work. It's easy to find who owns a gun by the number on it—that is, if you're respectable and register. So they'll find it wasn't Charlie's, see. I put Charlie's finger-prints round the gun, of course. But they'll find it wasn't Charlie's all right, and then maybe begin to get ideas and come nosing round here and find out about that call you put through to a certain number."

I said nothing. I tried to imagine Pete Fox and Charlie MacRae together. MacRae was sitting at the table and Pete Fox was standing opposite with the revolver in his hand. It somehow wouldn't work out. It wouldn't work out at all. Easy enough it was to see MacRae sitting there, with the grin of a lost soul on his leathery face. It was impossible to see Pete Fox standing opposite threatening him with the automatic. It wasn't in character. Perhaps no one knew

less about character than I did, but somehow I ventured to think I understood the old ex-Mayor. He hadn't, any more than I had, the lawless guts of a MacRae. No doubt he had slipped his automatic into his pocket before going to see his old enemy. Then one saw those dark eyes of MacRae's boring into the old man. And one knew, as though one had been there, that no woman on earth, not even a daughter or a betrothed, was of any importance to those two. Anyhow, men don't fight about women, not even lawless men. Many may pretend they do, but they don't. Men fight because they are brothers sharing—despite polite gestures of invitation to women—the inheritance of the earth, and they fight because the inheritance of the one turns sour in his belly while the other waxes strong. If there is one true thing we know about life, and we don't know but one or two, that is that one man is stronger than another, stronger and darker and richer in his being. The wheels of this world would

cease turning to-morrow if the strength that there is in some men was so much as assailable by the fury, the despair and the aspirations of their weaker brothers.

I glanced at the big, clumsy hulk of O'Neill still standing by the door fingering his billycock. Well, he was going on facts and I on theories. But I knew he was wrong. I saw MacRae's eyes boring into old Pete Fox, and I knew the old man had not been able to pull the trigger of the gun in his hand. I could see MacRae grinning desperately at that. It was his last gamble. And he had lost. Pete Fox wouldn't pull the trigger. The lost soul was a profoundly lost soul—that's what MacRae must have realised in the end.

O'Neill said : " So when they asked me whose gun it was I said it was Charlie's and that it had been given to him years ago by Pete Fox. Mr. Fox will know what to say when he's asked, because I'm going down there to see him now."

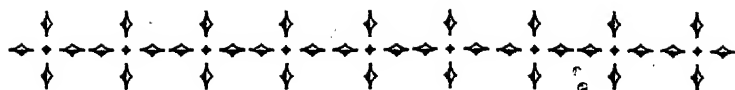
I said : " You better hadn't do that,

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O'Neill. "If Miss Marilyn is there . . ."

He said : " She'll never know, sir. Charlie planted it fine. And he asked you to put that call through so's it couldn't be traced easy. No one will ever know but you and me, and I guess you know enough now to keep your nose clean."

I said : " I'll say I do ! "



• XXI •

IN the course of the next few miserable days Sheila managed to develop her strategy of evasion to a point of perfection. To begin with, what is called a "nervous breakdown" brought her, the day after MacRae's death, under the care of doctors and nurses. I have never understood exactly what a "nervous breakdown" is and so have never had the audacity to have one, but many people appear to find it an excellent restorative in times of stress.

The doctors thought Sheila was seriously ill. But I ventured to think that she was only trying desperately hard to be too ill to use any of her faculties. And that was what, with a light woman's enviable dominion over realism, she managed to do. Day after day she lay in bed with a far-away expression in her flowery eyes, ema-

ciated, waxen white, gloriously beautiful. And afternoon upon afternoon I sat beside her bed at the clinic holding her hand. She seemed to like my being there, and I had nothing else in the world to do.

Then one day she said :

" You think I'm very stupid, don't you, André ? "

" I've given up thinking about anything, Sheila."

She smiled at me tenderly. Oh, she was a dear friend.

" Even about Marilyn ? "

" Oh, yes ! "

" I've been thinking a lot," she said.

A blond young German doctor, in whose charge she was, came in and looked at us with a seriously bewildered expression. Sheila was not supposed to talk.

He said : " Please, Mrs. Hepburn ! "

She said : " Go away."

The poor young man looked at me helplessly. He was in love with her, of course. He made a sign to me to say he wanted to

see me later, and went out. I sat stroking Sheila's lovely useless hand and wondering how she explained MacRae's death to herself. Then she looked at me and I saw that her eyes were beseeching me to give her some satisfactory explanation.

"The very first time I met him, Sheila, I said to myself: 'Here is a man who dislikes himself too much'——"

"I've been thinking about that, André. I fancy every successful man who doesn't know he's bad must be slightly insane."

"I think that's true, Sheila. The pirates, the kings, the conquerors, the magnates, the lawless great ones—they must be a little mad if they don't see how *bad* they are. And Charlie wasn't mad at all. And so he saw himself as he was, and he was intolerable to himself."

A glassy expression covered those dear flowery eyes. It was a sign that Sheila was about to utter a bromide.

"Lawlessness," she said, "has its own punishments."

"Perhaps it goes something like this, Sheila. Law and order, for instance, are very useful indeed for making the world safe for lawless people like Charlie MacRae. But this is where they get it in the neck—in loneliness. What is so curious about these lawless individuals is that their loneliness is more bitter than ours—and sometimes too bitter for them to bear. They snatch great successes from life, but it's just in the rich soil of those successes that the germs of their corruption thrive. If they are brutal and insensitive they can live out their time in the make-believe that they are men of destiny. But if they seek sympathy, if they so much as try to clutch at simple happiness, they find themselves at the mercy of their own self-knowledge. And that leaves them no peace, and sometimes it destroys them."

She said : " I may be stupid, but I know this. Men fight in and with themselves. They seem to like women to think that women have something to do with the struggling and fighting, but it's not true.

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Men fight in and with themselves, and that's the truth, and women are ultimately of no importance to them, and that's the truth, and God help us all."

And she said : " Why did he kill himself, André ? "

And I said : " Because the funny fellow thought you were too good for him."

She closed her eyes.

" You are a dear friend," she said, " but you *do* think I'm stupid, don't you ? "

Outside her room the blond young German doctor was waiting for me.

" What do you think ? " he said.

" She is getting better."

" Her lungs," he said . . .

" Oh, nonsense ! " I said. " For all that spiritual look, Mrs. Hepburn is as strong as a horse."

But Sheila, as I have said, managed to develop her strategy of evasion to a point of perfection. A few days later, and with an appearance of complete inevitability, she developed a seriously-affected right

lung, engaged a nurse-companion and, saying good-bye to me with those china eyes aghast at the amount of suffering in this world, took train to the life-giving climate of Arizona. Let us face the facts—what fun women get out of getting *behind* things !

I called at the clinic to settle her account, as Sheila had been in no state for such affairs. They told me the blond young German had gone to a sanatorium in Arizona.

Sheila's departure left me with nothing more to do in New York. I had, after several days of shirking the difficulties of such a letter, written to Marilyn. And that was that. Pierre and Isabella, after vainly trying to take me with them, had gone to Newport. Everything was packed, my passage engaged on the *Aquitania*, and also a second-class passage for O'Neill.

O'Neill, dressed in his extraordinary black clothes, now haunted my rooms under the impression that he was being my valet. His profound gloom lightened a little when the *Aquitania*, owing to my inertia, sailed

without us. I wondered why. I told him to engage passages on the *Ile-de-France*, due to sail in a couple of days.

It was quite early in the morning when I gave him this commission, and O'Neill did not put in an appearance again until the evening. Well, he was more of a man of mystery than a valet. But I felt lonely and querulous. I felt ill-used. When O'Neill at last came in I kept a sulky silence.

"I got those reservations," he said. "Boat sails midnight day after to-morrow."

"And you really intend coming with me, O'Neill?" I said gloomily.

"Sure, mister. I was down at Port Washington this noon saying good-bye to Mr. Fox. The old man said to me you had promised to say good-bye to him before sailing."

I said: "I've had quite enough of keeping my promises to Pete Fox."

"He asked for you, mister."

"You have still got a lot of packing to do, O'Neill."

"Won't take me a minute, sir."

"Not a second, the way you do it."

I had bought a sports Packard to take back with me to Europe. One has to try a new car. So I found myself, in the bright sunshine of the following afternoon, near Port Washington. But I did not find myself there until I had done a lot of hard thinking.

A man is under a queer and terrible compulsion. He must search for the key to his being. This is the tyranny and the mystery and the pain of life, that ordinary men are not complete unto themselves. We have our pride, of course. God in heaven, how funny that is! For our pride is a wearisome and trivial thing, an outward show, a childish thing. "We are separate," we cry, "we are individuals." This is a stupid lie. We are not separate, we are not entities, we are most damnably not complete. And we are under the compulsion of having to seek our complement in another. Was there ever such cruelty, to make men and women powerful in their little ways and

to make them helpless within the circle of their own beings? But this is the mystery of life, that ordinary men must search for the key to their beings in a woman or in a friend or in a child, but in their hearts they know they shall not find the thing they seek. Saints are the only practical men, for knowing all is vanity they also know that what they seek is in the hands of God, and they are saved by their faith. No one knows if these saints shall be saved in the next world, but certainly they are saved in this. I should like to be a saint. For a life of self-indulgence is overfull of the torments of martyrdom.

The door of Pete Fox's house stood open, and I walked in. No servant was about. The house was cool after the tropical heat outside, cool and very quiet. I opened the door of the room in which I had first seen the old man. The sunblinds were drawn, and he sat in the chair where I had last seen him, in his shirt sleeves, asleep. He was a very old and tired man now. All the

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false and rotten vitality had gone out of him, and he was but a shell cast up on the shores of old age.

He opened his eyes and saw me there.

"You come to say good-bye, son?"

"Yes."

"Go tell Marilyn. She's upstairs in her own room. Been waiting for you."

"I'm going to take her away with me if she will come."

"Now you do that. I've been waiting for you to come and fetch her."

"And you don't mind being left alone?"

"This is an old man's house, son. And get this into your young head—old age is a lonely place for any but good men and good women."

"I'll remember that."

"You won't, but there's no harm in trying."

I went out of the room and then I turned back.

"Did you kill MacRae?" I asked.

"A man's conscience, son, won't carry

more than a certain weight. I've put a lot on mine, but it wouldn't carry the killing of a man. Young MacRae did me a great wrong in his life. Before he died he tried to do me the greatest wrong of all, but I didn't do it. I left him my gun, though."

"Why?" I said. He did not say anything. His eyes, old and heavy, were shy. It was curious. I said: "Pete, I know why you left him your gun. You think it was because you hated him, but it was because you were sorry for him."

I went upstairs and found Marilyn in her room. She was making something with her fingers.

"What are you doing, Marilyn?"

"I'm making a hat. It stops me smoking, using my fingers like this."

"But isn't it very difficult to make a hat?"

"This is going to be just about the worst hat in the world, André."

"Do you think you will finish it in time? The boat sails to-morrow midnight."

A R O M A N C E

"I've been waiting, dear. Everything's packed."

"Are you sure you want to come with me, Marilyn?"

"I'd like to very much, dear."

"I suppose you know that you will be marrying a complete fool?"

"Will I, dear? Won't that be terrible!"

"I'll try to make you happy, Marilyn."

"Then take me in your arms, André, and say you love me."

"And what shall you say, Marilyn?"

"Oh, love hurts so! I'm scared of it."

"Don't be with me, dear."

"Do you promise, André?"

When she was most serious her brows had a way of playing a laughing game. Oh, she was a lovely thing.

"I do," I said.

"Oh, yeah?" she said.

THE END

